Instead of Bleeding, They Sing

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Instead of Bleeding, They Sing

by Square_Pancake

Summary

William Graham is the new star of the Baltimore Opera Company. After fending off a serial killer interested in his empathic abilities, Will draws the attention of FBI consultant Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal appreciates the artistry of his music; eventually he wonders if the singer will appreciate the artistry of his kills.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

A Capella

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In general Hannibal prefers the company of women- testosterone is sweet to his senses and clashes horribly with the scents that most men douse themselves with. That is not to suggest that his rolodex has any shortage of options from the fairer sex- pigs come in all shapes and sizes.

His preference for female singers, in particular sopranos, is a bit more complex. He can admit to himself that the high soaring notes of an opera singer call to mind the sweet voice that echoes in the darkest corners of his mind palace. Poor opera singers remind him horribly, viscerally, that the echoes are all he has left. But the truly gifted singers manage to tease out the nuances of his memories and lend a richness to what fleeting remains he has of Mischa.

So perhaps it is not a surprise that when the opera season starts, he only vaguely remembers that a new tenor has been added to the company. It explains the choice of Puccini's *Tosca* as the opening show; the opera has some of the most beautiful arias written for tenors. Clearly they wanted to showcase the new talent.

Hannibal is indifferent to the tenor right up until the start of *Recondita armonia* in the first act. The man in the role is lovely, lithe and younger than most singers. His curls sway slightly as he slinks gracefully across the stage. But Hannibal knows too much about the marvel of modern stage makeup to place too much value on appearances.

And then he begins to sing.

Hannibal is not a romantic, not really. But the tenor's voice reverberates with a passionate, almost obsessive love as he sings about his lover; it echoes Hannibal's own obsessive interests. There is something so piercingly true in his voice that Hannibal muses that he must be pulling from his real life to strengthen his music.

Between Acts 1 and 2, Hannibal makes a mental note that the tenor is off limits for his meal planning. A look at the program confirms that William Graham has proven his value as an

artist well enough that removing him would only remove some portion of beauty from the world, no matter what the Ripper could create with his body.

Hannibal does respect art, after all.

Act 3's romanza, *E lucevan le stelle*, is even more piercing. The soprano counterpart, one Hannibal had appreciated in the past, pales in comparison. Singing as Mario Cavaradossi, Graham's voice aches with the remembrance of torture, the pain of love lost, and the expectation of death. Hannibal captures the tremors of the vocals to overlay the insipid sniveling that usually fall from a person about to die.

It is during Act 3 that Hannibal decides that he'd spare for at least one season, any members of the opera board that pushed for Graham's recruitment into the Baltimore Opera Company. If the members could appreciate the tenor, then perhaps they were not entirely lost causes.

Overall, Hannibal is pleased with the prospects for the opera season. Graham's performance was moving enough that when Mrs. Komeda hints at a dinner party, Hannibal feels positively inspired. Mario Cavaradossi died just as he believed he had escaped his fate. It would be amusing to see the look on a pig's face in similar circumstances. Perhaps the vulgar catcaller he encountered two years ago would be a suitable target.

And that is where Hannibal's interest in Will Graham would have ended, if not for the combination of Dr. Chilton's smarmy pompousness, Hannibal's role as a consultant for the FBI, and Eldon Stammets' search for connections.

Though it galls him, Chilton is on the list of Hannibal's invitees for the dinner party celebrating the opening of the opera season. Still, Chilton has long been groomed as a potential patsy should the FBI begin to close in on Hannibal. Cultivating his, well, not friendship, but acquaintanceship perhaps, has made dealing with his terrible manners worthwhile.

And of course, with his ear for gossip and desire for recognition, Chilton occasionally does produce some fascinating information.

“Now Mrs. Komeda,” Chilton’s voice manages to be both pompous and obsequious, a combination that Hannibal washes from his mind by taking a fresh bite of the rosemary-fig tenderloin he had prepared for the party. The pungent rosemary is palate cleansing, and the satisfaction of turning a particularly obnoxious catcaller into something delicious works to overpower his desire to remove Chilton’s vocal cords.

Chilton continues, “I know that you were in favor of bringing William Graham into our lovely little opera company, but do you really think it was a wise decision?”

Mrs. Komeda barely graces the doctor with a raised eyebrow, merely confirming, “after listening to him in person, I am more pleased than ever. I’m surprised that even someone without musical training,” the ‘like you’ goes unstated, “doesn’t appreciate what a gem we’ve found. I’ve never heard a singer that managed to convey such a rich variety of emotions, especially at such a young age. He sings with the maturity of Plácido Domingo in his fifties.”

“Well, his disorder makes it a bit of a cheat, don’t you think?” The condescension in his voice has Hannibal interceding before Mrs. Komeda verbally eviscerates him; Chilton apparently has some new piece of information but lacks the subtlety to share it gracefully. Hannibal is curious enough to indulge the man.

“Disorder, Frederick? I do hope you’re not violating any expectations of confidentiality.”

Chilton waves away the suggestion dismissively. “I’m sure it’s known to anyone who has sought out his services.” When no one rises to the bait, Chilton huffs and continues. “In a certain sector of the art world, Graham is sought out as a savant at picking out counterfeits and forgeries.”

“I fail to see how that in any way would make his inclusion in the Baltimore Opera a mistake.” Mrs. Komeda notes. “Having an artistic eye or outside interests hardly detracts from his talents.”

“That’s the point, though. It’s not talent that makes him a gifted singer or a consummate art appraiser.” Confident that Chilton cannot sing nor appraise art, Hannibal places little value on that assessment. “Really, he can only do both because of his empathy disorder.”

Hannibal doesn't give Chilton the satisfaction of looking interested, but he is curious nonetheless.

Without prompting, Chilton continues, "he can portray emotions so well because he can feel what other people feel- he's just a mirror, reflecting other people. Practically a psychic vampire."

"And the art?" asks another guest, the rest of the table clearly listening in on the ongoing discussion.

"I've not seen it in person, but apparently Graham can recreate a scene from an artist's perspective, can learn an artist so well that he instinctively knows whether they produced any given piece of art."

"Fascinating," Mrs. Komeda acknowledges, "but even with a disorder of that nature, do you really think his vocal training, his acting, his understanding of art, takes no skill?"

"Indeed, I would think it takes more skill to be able to portray such varied and rich emotions, to understand an artist so deeply, and still remain himself," Hannibal says smoothly. "Functioning with an empathy disorder would be a great challenge, especially in a highly emotive environment. I am dreadfully curious to how you found out about this, Frederick."

Chilton lowers his voice before saying, "I'm sure you heard that part of Graham's contract excuses him from some of the more public social events, I was merely the doctor who reviewed the records to confirm that his antisocial traits would not be dangerous." There is clear frustration and bitterness in his voice when he continues, "the man refused to be interviewed, even though he'd be the perfect subject for a new paper I'm working on."

The clear breach in propriety and patient privacy is not unnoticed by the people at the table. While they enjoyed the gossip, Chilton has inadvertently limited his access to the social strata he was trying to enter. No one wanted to be fodder for future revelations.

The topic is closed with Mrs. Komeda's firm "he has clearly nurtured both a talent and a rare gift. I, at least, am more pleased than ever that he's joined us."

The conversation flows on, but Hannibal is caught by the idea of Graham standing in the shoes of an artist, of knowing their process so intimately as to immediately see a forgery. He wonders what the man would see in art made by the Chesapeake Ripper.

Later, as she leaves, Mrs. Komeda murmurs to Hannibal, "Chilton clearly doesn't have the discretion necessary to work with artists. Can I call on you to make a referral if the director or a singer needs medical attention, mental or otherwise?"

"Of course, it would be my honor to help in any fashion." Unfortunately with Chilton as the vanguard of Baltimore's opera community, Graham will most likely not seek medical help through the opera's connections. But offering referrals to less interesting members would be no hardship and would be an easy way to undermine Chilton's attempts to gain prominence.

Hannibal can only sigh in resignation when a week later the arts page is filled with speculation as to Will Graham's supposed empathy and ability to connect with anyone. The column insinuates that Graham uses his emotional connections and possibly his physical attributes to obtain parts beyond his skills. At least the article notes that the singer is intensely reclusive, which serves both as an explanation for the failure to interview him and as a shield to the poor man from those who would rudely invade his life. Hannibal makes note of the writer; such lies about the skill of an artist really deserve an immediate response.

Chapter End Notes

Recondita Armonia Mario Cavaradossi extolling his love, Tosca, as more lovely than the inspiration for his painting of Mary Magdalene.

"E lucevan le stelle," Mario Cavaradossi's mournful farewell in Puccini's Tosca.

Ritornello

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As far as anyone other than Hannibal can tell, his work with the FBI begins at the behest of his erstwhile student, Alana Bloom. Eager to see the best in people, Alana has long been an unwitting accessory to Hannibal's person suit. Her affection and admiration serves to reflect her own humanity onto Hannibal. Arranging for her to recommend his services as a consultant to the BAU is easy and another benefit of a patiently cultivated relationship. He gains access to the inner workings of the FBI with only minimal manipulations.

His main goal is to monitor the FBI's investigations into his artistic activities: as interesting as she might turn out, Hannibal doesn't have the time for another Miriam Lass.

The novelty of profiling other serial killers, of seeing their habits and mistakes, is an unexpectedly agreeable secondary benefit.

Seeing the horror in Jack's eyes as he begins to understand that the Minnesota Shrike is eating the girls he's taken is inspirational- that moment alone makes it worth the headache of dealing with the strident agent.

Hearing the second-hand devastation in Alana's voice when she tells him that the local police had ignored Hannibal's profile that the Shrike would lash out if threatened, and that as a result Hobbs had managed to slaughter his own family before being gunned down is a delectable garnish to an already satisfying consolation.

So Hannibal is more than ready to agree to look at Jack Crawford's most recent crime scene in person instead of reviewing photos and constructing a profile.

He could have done without the stench though. Jack's urgent request for Hannibal's insight makes sense as the victims are uncovered from the loamy ground. The corpses and one soon-to-be corpse are grotesque- sure to cause a public outcry for the case to be solved.

Hannibal cannot see art in using humans as comatose mushroom farms.

“Thank you for coming, Dr. Lecter,” Jack Crawford booms. “I was hoping you might offer some insight.”

“Naturally, that *is* why I’ve agreed to consult with you, Jack.” Answering his title with Crawford’s first name is exactly the subtle dominance that the psychiatrist favors.

Jack’s voice lowered as he approaches. “To be honest, it’s your medical expertise that I could use here. Your identification of the cancer in Elise Nichols’s liver helped us make the connection to Hobbs as a hunter. I’m hoping now you can tell us how people could be buried in shallow graves and just allow fungus to grow on them.”

“There are any number of sedatives that could be used, Jack. As far as I know, none of them are natural fungicides. And while I may be trained as a medical doctor, I cannot perform autopsies simply by looking at a crime scene.” There is a vague fruity scent under the stench of decay, but Hannibal cannot identify the source with any degree of accuracy, though he thinks it may be ketoacidosis. Moreover, the scent could be indicators of any number of drugs that induced renal failure. He really doesn't have the patience for Jack’s expectations of miraculous diagnoses after a single instance of an easily identifiable disease in an autopsy lab.

Seeing the frustration mounting on Jack’s face, Hannibal elects to add what insights he can. “Frankly, I find it more interesting that he was using living humans to grow what appear to be wild, and therefore mostly inedible, mushrooms. This killer is looking for something here and it’s not food.”

“Sadism,” offers Brian Zeller, confirming Hannibal’s low opinion of the man as a profiler. It’s for the best that his role is mostly in forensics.

“It’s too early to be sure, but I don’t see any indications of torture,” comments Beverly Katz.

“Being infested with mushrooms while being buried alive sounds torturous to me,” Zeller says.

“But if they were sedated- then they wouldn’t be suffering,” Katz counters.

“Not to mention that they were buried, out of sight. If the killer was a sadist, they’d have wanted to see the suffering. No, I agree Dr. Lecter that there is more here,” Jack says. For all that Hannibal is less than impressed with the man, he does have to admit that the agent has a decent grasp on human psychology.

“The structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain: an intricate web of connections,” Hannibal muses.

“So you’re saying he was trying to connect these people together?” Jack asks.

“Perhaps he is just trying to understand *how* people connect,” Hannibal says. “He is looking for a way to connect with someone, anyone. Perhaps he believes the fungus will show him how.”

“That sounds crazy.” Hannibal controls his facial expression instead of snarling at Zeller’s dismissiveness. The anger passes quickly. Though Hannibal does add him to the list of people he plans to take out if he is forced to run. The list is too long to finish if he actually had to retreat, but it’s always nice to be able to plan targets in advance.

Katz’s declaration that, “he buried people alive for a mushroom farm. I don’t think his craziness is in question,” effectively ends Zeller's questioning.

With no further information to add to a profile and no miraculous medical insight to offer, Hannibal gladly takes his leave from the reeking site.

Bright red hair catches his eye as he leaves. Freddie Lounds is easily recognizable, but it is not his job to keep outsiders from the scene. If the police are gullible enough to talk to her, then let them suffer the consequences.

The TattleCrime article is full of speculation. Fortunately, Hannibal's name isn't mentioned. For all that he wants insight into the FBI, he'd rather his name not be officially connected with any form of law enforcement. He'd never see the more interesting patients if they thought he was involved with the FBI.

Mostly, Hannibal notes that Lounds dwells on the concept of connections he himself had raised- finishing the article with the questions, "but now that he has killed, who among us can truly connect with him? Other killers may very well lack the ability, but who else can truly empathize with a killer?"

Hannibal's normal patients keep him too occupied to contemplate the case or try to expand his profile. But when Jack calls to ask how a person can be sedated with sugar water, it is easy to make the connection to kidney failure and diabetic comas. The actual grunt police work is all that's needed from that point, and Hannibal assumes that his role is complete.

Naturally, that assumption is challenged when the man, Eldon Stammets, evades arrest. At least Hannibal can be assured that there will be minimal stench at Stammets's workstation when Crawford asks him to look it over.

Other than the TattleCrime.com article in his browser and an old copy of the Baltimore Sun, Stammets's desk is clean. There are no obvious hints as to where he might flee without a car.

"But you can be certain that he will try to find someone new to plant," Hannibal pronounces.

"Even though he knows the FBI is after him?" asks one police officer skeptically.

"He's too far gone," agrees Jack. "Someone like this can't stop. It's not rational, but neither is looking at fungus for social tips."

Hannibal lays enough groundwork to ensure that he will be called in for the mental health assessment if they manage to take Stammets alive. An organized, yet abnormal psyche is always interesting to prod.

He has already canceled his afternoon appointments, which leaves Hannibal with some unanticipated free time. It's not the right time to go hunting, not when Jack might call at some point with news, and he does not feel inclined to write or to paint. So instead of turning towards his office or his home, Hannibal drives towards Baltimore and the opera house.

Hannibal considers the word hunch to be rather gauche. But his instinct to check the location is not strong enough to be a suspicion and premonition is not quite accurate either. Still, the only printed item at Eldon's work desk was a copy of the Baltimore Sun from Saturday; as he left the crime scene he remembered that an article was published in that edition of the paper commenting on the Baltimore Opera's announcement that they were putting on a special showing of *Dead Man Walking*.

The modern opera centered around Joseph De Rocher, a convicted murderer who was approaching his execution. While praising the opera's modern subject matter and sharp musical crafting, the article had questioned the wisdom of casting William Graham in the role of a modern murderer, suggesting that his ability to empathize with killers was a dangerous trait to cultivate.

He really did wish he'd had time to take care of the reviewer before the newest article; alas that the Shrike and Hannibal's cultivation of the FBI took precedence over defense of the arts.

After reading the first article announcing Graham's empathy disorder, Hannibal had believed Chilton to be the source. With the newest article continuing to raise the issue, Hannibal idly wonders if someone was trying to push Graham into therapy or perhaps psychiatric observation. It seems a bit convoluted for a man like Chilton.

No matter the source, the answer to the TattleCrime's question is written in plain ink; William Graham could connect to killers. A man as desperate for understanding as Stammets might very well seek out a final victim with a greater chance of seeing him.

Jack would probably listen to Hannibal should he call, but frankly he doesn't really want to see agents trampling through what could be a fascinating meeting. Hannibal would much rather observe himself and intervene if necessary to protect the singer. With luck, he'll

manage to keep Stammets alive to study while ingratiating himself with a new object of interest.

With Hannibal's connections, a visit to the opera house will not be seen as unusual. A moment to check in with the new tenor won't be seen as out of place either. If he's wrong, then there is no cost to his reputation or his time. And if he's right, it's easy to explain away his presence.

Hannibal has no idea where Graham lives, but then he rather doubts Stammets has gained that information either. Fortunately, late-afternoon will have most of the singers warming up for the evening. William Graham is almost certainly at the opera house. Even better, with his disinclination towards socializing and status as the newest star of the company, Graham has a fairly isolated and private dressing room. Even if the singer isn't there, Hannibal begins to believe that Stammets will be.

He drifts through the opera house without drawing any attention to himself. Given his sartorial choices, Hannibal is always pleased when he manages to evade people's eyes. This time, his stealth is particularly valuable.

As he approaches the singer's dressing room, the faint, distinctive, odor of decay and manure establish Stammets's presence. Raised voices confirm that he is not alone. Hannibal has already missed the start of the conversation, but's he's not overly concerned. Stammets is committed to his vision- there is little chance he'll kill the singer outright. Far more likely the man will emerge from the dressing room carrying along a drugged, but living Graham. That will be the perfect moment to strike.

Hannibal waits for his prey to emerge and listens to the conversation.

"You don't need the gun." From what Hannibal has heard about the empathy disorder, William Graham must see the depth of the insanity courting him. Yet the voice is calm, soothing even. Hannibal is surprised, given how Stammets probably has fully embraced his own madness and its potentially corrosive influence.

The man's muttering confirms this belief.

“I need you to see. I need you to reach back.”

“That’s why you don’t need the gun. I see you,” Graham’s voice is seductive. The light tenor dips into a deeper register and Hannibal finds himself moving forward before he catches himself.

“I understand what you are trying to tell me,” the singer continues. “You’re right, a field of mycelium knows that you are there. I don’t need the mycelium to reach back.”

Hannibal can easily picture the man reaching out to the unstable Stammets.

“You, you don’t?” Stammets’s voice is full of wonder. It’s as though the empathic singer has granted all of his dreams with the single statement.

“No. I don’t. That’s why you came for me, right?” There is a knowing tone that Hannibal just barely catches. He wonders what subtext he’s missing from Graham’s life that would provide that nuance.

“Yes, the article said you would understand me.” The man’s voice breaks on a half-choked sob. His relief is palpable, even muffled through the closed door.

“Of course,” Graham assures him. “Now relax, and I’ll go with you. You can show me *everything* .”

There is the sound of shuffling, and Hannibal tenses in anticipation.

The door doesn’t open. Instead, a sharp cry of surprise is followed by a gunshot. The pained moan that follows is unidentifiable, and Hannibal debates with himself on whether he should intervene.

Before he decides, Stammets cries out, “but, you would have seen! You would…”

Four more shots interrupt.

There is a silence.

Then Hannibal distinctly hears someone mutter “shit.” Based on Stammets’s outcry, it must be Graham swearing. A shuffling sound follows, then Hannibal hears cloth tearing and a muffled, pained grunt.

In the silence, Hannibal waits. There’s a distinct clink of something on metal. And then, very faintly, quiet noises from a phone. Since there is a (probably) dead body in there, Graham is almost certainly calling the police.

This is confirmed when a panicked voice cries, “Please, help- someone just attacked me. He had a gun and it fired and now he’s on the ground, and please send someone to help.” He didn’t sound anywhere near this distressed during his conversation with Stammets. Hannibal listens as Graham identifies himself and his location before begging again for help to arrive. It’s a magnificent performance.

Before the singer continues with the dispatcher, Hannibal calls out.

“Mr. Graham? My name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. I heard gunshots. Do you need assistance?” His voice is calm and authoritative- intentionally the opposite of Stammets’s mad muttering.

Hannibal can hear the silence of surprise from the other side of the door.

“I’m on the phone with 9-1-1,” he finally calls.

“That does not actually answer my question,” says Hannibal. “Do you need assistance? Have you been injured?”

“Uh, yeah, um. You can come in.” Hannibal smirks at the faint note of bewilderment in the man’s voice.

He carefully pushes open the door.

The tableau before him is striking. Graham stands barefoot in the middle of the room, his hair a wild halo of curls. The wayward pharmacist is crumpled on his side, one hand still stretched towards the empath in supplication, gunshot wounds piercing his chest. Blood pools on the floor, coating Graham’s feet. It has sprayed across his face in a spatter of crimson, the perfect droplets highlighting his features. It’s even more flattering than stage makeup, thinks Hannibal.

The singer’s right hand holds the gun, pointed carefully at the ground, while his left is clasped against his clavicle. Blood seeps slowly through a long cut across his collarbone, oozing between his fingers. Hannibal notices a knife on the ground near Stammets's outstretched hand.

For an instant, Graham looks poised for more violence, the gun held in an unflinching hand, his eyes calculating as Hannibal edges into the room.

As soon as he’s assessed Hannibal, Graham’s demeanor shifts smoothly. If he had not seen the predatory glint in his eye, Graham’s impression of a man in shock would have fooled even Hannibal.

As soon as Hannibal is fully in the room, the singer staggers slightly before dropping to his knees. The blood seeps into the cloth of his pants and the gun falls to the floor.

Hannibal carefully approaches and leans down to check on Stammets. A quick touch to his neck tells him that the man has already bled out. He begins to reach for the singer to inspect his wound when he’s interrupted.

A tinny voice echoes from the phone abandoned on the small file cabinet next to the singer.

Holding up a hand placatingly, Hannibal picks up the phone. He starts to speak and does not allow the dispatcher to interrupt him.

"This is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, I am a consultant with the FBI. I am here with Mr. Graham. He's been wounded, it appears to be a slash from a knife. I can identify the other man as Eldon Stammets. He's currently the primary suspect in a series of murders. Please contact Jack Crawford at the Behavioral Analysis Unit at the FBI and notify him. He'll want to process the scene personally. There is no danger to Mr. Graham at this point, so please just have any officers en route secure the area."

Hannibal ends the call.

While the doctor spoke, Graham had begun to shake slightly. It's a masterful impression of going into shock, an intentional invocation of the state, or a genuine reaction. Hannibal rather doubts the final option, but he still pulls his coat off to drape around the smaller man.

He guides the singer up, off the floor and to the small, ratty couch in the corner. He shifts the clothing littering the surface away before helping Graham settle. Staying standing, Hannibal pulls out his clean handkerchief and neatly folds it. He then pulls the singer's hand away from the wound along his clavicle.

Though it bleeds freely, the wound itself is superficial. It will take three or four stitches at most, merely as a precaution and to limit scarring.

Still, he carefully presses the clean cloth to the slash and then guides the singer's hand back to hold it in place.

"Do you have any other injuries?"

"No, just this one. You said you work for the FBI? How did you know he'd be here?" The question is an honest one, expected really. The suspicious glint in the man's eye tells Hannibal that a less than truthful response would be met with outright hostility.

“I do some consulting work, but I don’t work for the FBI, no. And I’m here because I’m a member of the Board for the theatre and I had a hunch.”

To his surprise, the singer doesn’t ask any other questions. Instead the man leans back, allowing his head to lay against the back of the couch, his neck arching.

Hannibal wants to taste the blood on his skin and add more with his own teeth.

While he certainly enjoys sex, and William Graham is appealing, the strength of Hannibal’s interest is unsettling. He forces himself to look away from the taut, vulnerable skin of the singer’s jawline.

The man is simply dressed. The relatively cheap khaki pants and green cotton oxford shirt are both well worn. They probably just skirt the edge of the unspoken dress code.

Given his looks and his talents, the singer could have easily obtained a wealthy patron either before he joined the opera in Baltimore, or even this soon after his arrival. Hannibal can think of three people offhand who’d love to have the singer on their arm or in their bed. Any such patron would shower the artist in rich clothing, silks and fine wool, jewelry in the place of Graham’s simple wristwatch.

So the worn, cheap clothing is clearly a choice. The implied statement that Graham has no patron, no protector, adds an edge of defiant vulnerability to the already youthful features.

It is deliciously attractive, even more so when Hannibal considers his own coat draped across the singer’s shoulders.

During his assessment, Hannibal moves away from the singer so he is no longer looming above him. Tension seeps from William’s frame as Hannibal gives him a bit more space. Still, the doctor stays well within touching distance. He’s not quite ready to let him out of reach.

The police will arrive any second, and he wants to be able to watch William’s face throughout the aftermath.

Chapter End Notes

Dead Man Walking is a real opera that was first performed in 2000. The male lead is actually a baritone, but I'm taking artistic license to make it a tenor role.

Ritornello:
A ritornello (Italian; "little return") is a recurring passage in Baroque music for orchestra or chorus.

Coloratura

Chapter Summary

Will is interviewed by the FBI following the death of Stammets

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal is unsurprised that the police wait outside the dressing room for the FBI to arrive once they've confirmed that there is no active threat. For all of his faults, or perhaps because of his faults, Jack Crawford has cast a wide shadow over Baltimore law enforcement. The news that the crime scene is a part of his case must have spread very quickly.

The paramedics are far less impressed with the police's trepidation. A pair of them enter the room over the vocal protests of the officer at the door. One drops to check the corpse, and the other approaches William where he sits slumped on the couch, hand still pressed tightly to his wound.

"Hi, my name is Keith, I'm a paramedic," he says softly. "Is it okay if I touch your arm and shoulder?" At William's hesitance, the paramedic continues, "it's fine if you want to wait a bit. Do you think you could lay down for me?"

Hannibal is impressed- clearly he had some sort of trauma training in the past, and was focusing on giving the victim of violence some agency. He's always approving of competence and makes a mental note to contact the hospital Keith's attached to: it's an excuse to reinforce any contacts he has there under the guise of altruistically praising someone else.

"Why?" the singer's voice is soft, but not hoarse. Apparently there are limits to the damage William is willing to do to himself in the name of authenticity.

"You're showing some symptoms of shock," Keith says calmly. "Laying down would let me see to your wound and also check for other symptoms, sir."

“Will. My name is Will Graham. You can just call me Will.” The words are dazed, and seemingly repeated by rote.

Hannibal took note of the preference. Few things were as alienating to people as continually referring to them in a manner they did not prefer.

“Thank you Will. You’ve been kept warm,” here the paramedic shoots Hannibal an approving look, “and I can see that you’ve kept pressure on the wound, but I think laying down would help steady you.”

Hannibal knew this, of course. The physical wound was insufficient to cause hypovolemic shock, so he had only made sure emotional trauma didn’t push Will into a truly dangerous state. He was more interested in seeing what physical symptoms Will could induce as a way to garner sympathy than he was in treating relatively benign symptoms. (The thought that Will was, in fact, reacting naturally to his circumstances has been discarded. There are too many sharp looks hidden in Will’s eyes, and for all that he has just killed a man, is still bleeding, and in a room with a stranger, Hannibal still cannot smell any fear.)

Still, acting the part of the traumatized victim, Will complies with the paramedic, and stretches his lithe body across the couch. He lifts his hand to the paramedic, and draws the man to the makeshift bandage.

Taking the hint, Keith carefully reveals the wound. As Hannibal had noted before, it’s a clean cut, a bit deeper towards the shoulder, lifting away where the knife was pulled across Will’s body towards his chest.

In the background, Hannibal can hear the other paramedic arguing with the officer. Apparently he is unwilling to allow a stretcher into the room to contaminate it further.

“Will, you’re going to need a few stitches. You’re not in any danger, so I won’t give you any temporary stitches here; the doctor at the ER will take care of it. I’m going to clean it up and put some butterfly bandages across the widest part before we transport you.”

That garners more of a reaction than anything else Hannibal has seen yet.

The singer begins to struggle to sit up while arguing fiercely, “absolutely not. The show starts at 7:30. I’ll barely have enough time to prepare if I start now, let alone if I go to the ER.”

The paramedic sounds shocked, exclaiming, “you can’t mean to perform tonight! You need to rest, let your mind and body heal.”

Will’s jaw sets and he grits out, “no, I need to prepare to be Joseph De Rocher. The butterfly bandages you were talking about will be enough to get me through until tonight. I can have someone take me to the hospital after the performance.” Under his breath the singer continues, “and it will get me out of the post-show socializing.”

Hannibal is intrigued by the fact that Will has no doubts that he will be available to perform tonight, even as the man he killed cools on the floor. He must have no fear that anyone will see this as anything but self-defense.

The paramedic looks consternated. As a paramedic he could probably give temporary stitches, but only if a patient was being taken to the ER and needed emergency triage before they arrived.

Fortunately, Hannibal was more than qualified to intervene.

“Perhaps I can be of assistance?” Hannibal offers silkily. “My name is Hannibal Lecter. Before I switched specialties, I was an ER surgeon. I have maintained my board certification. If you fetch your suture kit, I can take care of Mr. Graham.”

As he had hoped, the singer immediately offers, “You can call me Will, Dr. Lecter.”

“Then please, call me Hannibal,” he answers. He muses how best to capitalize on this opportunity. “You shouldn’t need more than a few stitches. Though there is a cost.”

“Oh?” There is venom under that innocuous response. A lesser man would take the bait.

Instead, Hannibal responds, “I need you to promise me you will see a physician to have the wound inspected in the next few days and then the stitches removed when it has healed.”

“Not going to insist that I see you?” There is a note of surprise in the question. Clearly chains of obligation are very familiar to Will Graham, and he had expected Hannibal to try and attach some. But that sort of plebeian manipulation is pointless; it will neither grant him insight into the increasingly interesting singer, nor will it fuel any reciprocal interest in Hannibal.

Keeping his teeth carefully behind his lips as he counterfeits a gentle smile, Hannibal says, “I am no longer an active surgeon even if I am certified. I offer this as a service to a fellow art lover and a token of admiration for one so devoted to his craft. If you wish for me to examine it later, I will of course oblige, but I cannot in good conscience keep you away from the emergency room if you are going to use it as an excuse to avoid further medical attention.”

There is a pause, during which Will raises his gaze to Hannibal’s face. For the first time the singer makes direct eye contact.

The avoidance had been cleverly hidden before, probably a part of his stage training to make every single member of the feel as though the singer was singing directly at them. If not for the sense that William Graham is trying to flay his person suit through his gaze alone to reveal the monster underneath as the singer looks at him now, Hannibal would have continued to accept the previous, feigned, eye contact as genuine.

But Hannibal has worked for years to make his mask as detailed and disarming as possible. Will may sense that there is something awry, but Hannibal is reasonably confident that he will see nothing else. Though the singer’s considering glance towards the corpse and then back at Hannibal is a bit concerning.

Rather than openly question his motives, Will asks, “so if I promise to let a doctor check on me, you’ll stitch me up well enough to perform tonight? The choreography isn’t too

physically straining."

Hannibal accepts the suture kit from the paramedic who had checked Stammets's corpse and says, "yes, that…"

Naturally this is when he is interrupted by Jack Crawford and the forensics team from the FBI.

"Dr. Lecter! They told me you called in to have the police notify us? What were you doing here? Perhaps you could offer an explanation?" Fortunately for Jack's continued health, there is no suspicion laced in the confused tone.

"Jack, please allow me to attend to my medical duties first. I want to give you my full attention, but Mr. Graham is still bleeding."

Slightly abashed, Jack turns his attention onto the wounded singer. "Mr. Graham, I am sorry that you have become involved in this investigation."

When the singer merely hisses in pain as Hannibal swabs the wound with betadine, Jack continues, "can you please tell me what happened?"

As he kneels by Will's side, Hannibal can see him rapidly calculating the best path. "I'm sorry, who are you?" he asks, licking his lips nervously.

Hannibal wants to snort in amusement. Jack is usually a bit better with interviewing civilians, but the death of the primary suspect in such a high profile case by the hands of someone who could arguably be considered a public figure has thrown him off his stride.

"My name is Jack Crawford, I'm the Agent-in-Charge at the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI."

Tears well in Will's eyes. They are just enough to provide a sheen without making the singer look weak. "They didn't say, outloud at least. The man is dead? Oh God, do I need a, should I get a lawyer? Maybe I should talk to the house manager."

"You're not under arrest, nor even suspected of a crime" Jack interjects. Clearly he doesn't want to deal with the headache of a lawyer trying to protect a witness. "Mr. Stammets is the suspect in a series of murders, and based on your 911 call, it seems that you were acting in self-defense. If the rest of the investigation confirms that, then I'm sure there will be no charges filed."

Looking at Will, pale and distraught, his eyes shining with tears, his face tilted to enhance his youthful features, Hannibal is certain that no jury would convict him of anything when put up against Stammets's crimes. Even the dried blood just makes him look more vulnerable.

Apparently reassured enough to answer questions, Will begins to explain what happened. Hannibal listens as best he can while he stitches the wound. In an emergency room, with time constraints and triage necessities, Hannibal would have only made three stitches. Here he can carefully suture across the wound with smaller stitches that will minimize scarring. It will also force the next doctor to take their time removing the stitches. If Hannibal is the one who is called upon, it's more time to subtly control the singer.

Will speaks about the strange, wild-eyed man who pushed into the dressing room without warning and demanded his name. The described confrontation is exactly what Hannibal expects to hear, and glancing up at Jack, it is clear the agent accepts it as well.

This changes when Will continues, "so I told him I'd go with him."

"You told someone you clearly believed was unstable that you would go with him?" the skepticism in Jack's voice is unexpected.

Will's sounds confused, "yes? I did mention he had a gun, right? What did you expect me to do?"

“Ah no, you didn’t mention the gun Mr. Graham,” Jack’s tone has relaxed- going with a madman who has a gun is a bit more understandable.

That gives the singer pause. “Oh. Well. He was muttering something about… mycelium I think?”

The suture is done and Hannibal is taking his time with the rest of the bandaging. He has a clear look at Will’s face when he closes his eyes to concentrate.

When he next speaks, the cadences are different than before. The carefully trained projection and enunciation are lost as he quotes, “We all evolved from mycelium. If you walk through a field of mycelium, they know you are there. The spores reach for you as you walk by. You need to come with me. I want to help you evolve.”

Hannibal elects to clarify, “mycelium is fungus, Mr. Graham. He wanted to be able to connect with someone like a web of mycelium does.”

Will’s eyes open again, while he shudders slightly. This time Hannibal does not believe the reaction is feigned. “He was going to bury me. To watch me grow towards him.” There is a surety in Will’s voice that Hannibal finds fascinating.

Will continues, “so, like I said, I told him I’d go with him. When he started telling me that I needed to see him and reach back, I agreed.”

“Many people would panic. It’s commendable that you kept a level head,” Jack acknowledges.

“Well I wish I had stayed calm,” the singer’s voice rises in apparent distress. “Because when he pointed the gun away from me, I tried to grab it.”

“Is that when the shots were fired?” asks Jack. Hannibal is surprised at how gentle the man’s voice is.

“No, I thought I had it, I mean I had two hands on it and he had only one, but then he grabbed a knife from the table and he...” the singer trails off, making a gesture that is easy to interpret as a slash across his chest.

“The knife was on the table? Why did you have a knife on your dressing room table Mr. Graham?” In spite of the question, Jack doesn’t look too concerned.

The singer shrugs, wincing slightly at pull of the wound and says, “there are a bunch of tools over there. It’s always useful to have them around- you never know when something in the theatre will need to be quickly repaired or patched. I suppose I’m lucky he didn’t grab the hammer.”

Eyeing the relative sizes of the singer and the pharmacist, Jack nods thoughtfully. In contrast, the revelation that the knife belongs to Will makes the situation click in Hannibal’s mind. The cloth ripping after the shots were fired, the pained noise after Stammets was already dead. The wound on Will was self-inflicted, physical evidence of his need to use deadly force. Hannibal admits to himself that he’s both impressed with the man’s dedication to the story and a bit besotted with the idea of the singer cutting himself open.

“So, the man cut you with the knife. What happened next Mr. Graham.”

Here the singer looks thoughtful, eyeing Hannibal cautiously through his lashes. Clearly he’s not certain how much he had heard through the door. Hannibal congratulates himself again at his redirection of Jack’s questioning so Will would have to go first. He plans to support any reasonable story Will offers.

“It’s a bit jumbled,” the singer deflects. “The gun went off, it hit him- in the leg maybe? And then he was still lurching towards me and I shot again and the gun vibrated in my hand and oh god…” Will’s breathing accelerated rapidly as reality apparently dawned on him. “He’s dead. I killed him. Oh god.”

Glaring at the men around her, Beverly takes this moment to intervene. Edging past where Jack hovered over the singer, Beverly sat on the edge of the couch and gently patted the

distraught man's hand. Clearly sensing an ally, Will curled towards her, grasping her hand for apparent comfort.

Jack raises an eyebrow, unimpressed with her interference.

"The gun has been modified for dual burst fire. I'm not sure when the switch was flipped, but with the recoil from the burst fire, Mr. Graham is lucky he even managed to control the gun." Then turning towards Will, she says gently, "do you know how many shots were fired?"

"Six? I think? Aren't there supposed to be six shots in a gun?"

"No," says Beverly delicately. "In a Glock like that, the magazine holds at least ten rounds." The singer's ignorance makes Jack grimace slightly.

"Oh," Will sounds lost. "I didn't know that. But after the shots were fired and he wasn't moving, I called 911. And then Dr. Lecter came into help."

"I can confirm that there was the sound of struggle before shots were fired," Hannibal says. "I did not see it, of course, but there was some shouting and then gunfire in a burst." Hannibal mentally thanked Beverly for that piece of information. "When I heard Mr. Graham call 911, I felt it was safe to try and intervene."

"Which reminds me, what are you doing here, Dr. Lecter?"

"I needed to stop by the opera house to speak to the stage manager on behalf of the board anyway, so when my afternoon became free, I elected to visit while the company warmed up." Hannibal internally thanked Mrs. Komeda for asking him to check on the opera company's medical resources. "I had a vague recollection about empathy and the opera being mentioned in the Baltimore Sun's review of the newest show- the copy that was on Stammets's desk I believe. When I passed Mr. Graham's dressing room and heard someone muttering about making connections, it clicked into place."

“You’re saying that it was a coincidence?” Jack asks doubtfully.

“Not at all. While it took hearing Mr. Stammets speak to make the conscious connection, I believe my subconscious had latched onto Mr. Graham as a potential target.”

“Your subconscious immediately picked out an opera singer as the natural target of a pharmacist who has previously preyed on diabetics?”

Hannibal glances pointedly at the corpse. “Clearly it was not such an extreme jump as you are implying, Jack. But given that there was an article about Mr. Graham and his empathic ability to portray a murderer in the current show, it does not seem like such a leap to me.”

Throughout their conversation, Will has been curled towards Beverly and the comfort she offered, looking entirely oblivious. Hannibal decides to test that.

“Mr. Graham has just been through a traumatic experience, Jack. Perhaps it’s best to let him be tended to and then visit you at Quantico if you have further questions.”

Hannibal hid his smirk at the stiffening of Will’s shoulders under his ripped shirt. The singer probably did not care for Hannibal offering him up for a more in depth interview, but could hardly complain without seeming unreasonable.

Seeing the sense in that, Jack nods and turns his attention back to the singer. The man raises his head; his hands have matted his curls with blood as he fidgeted under Hannibal’s care, and they temporarily veil his eyes. The blood soaking the knees of his pants and the streaks of blood where he fretfully touched himself contrast with the careful bandaging. That contrast only made the singer seem more fragile, and not even Jack is immune.

“Mr. Graham, as I said before, I am sorry you were targeted by Mr. Stammets. If it is any comfort, I hope you can accept that his death has probably saved not only your own life, but any other victims he would have continued to seek out.”

“I’m not sure what to do with that information Agent Crawford,” he admits. “I don’t want to think about this right now. I just want to get through today.”

The interview ends with Will seen as a brave, wounded victim trying to understand what happened to him. Hannibal doubts that Jack will even bother calling him in for another interview. Jack has already seen enough for Stammets to be no great loss. With the opera company sure to close ranks to protect their star tenor, as long as he gets assurances that the victim is getting any help he needs, Jack won’t want to poke that mess.

The way Jack retreats as soon as the stage manager enters the room confirms his suspicion. Hannibal passes on the medical instructions for Will, and accepts the offer of a chance to see tonight’s performance. By accepting, it will give him the chance to subtly encourage the stage manager to send Will to him for treatment. He had planned to attend later in the week, but sees no reason not to adjust his plans.

After all, tonight Will sings from the view of a killer, as a killer himself. And he will move across the stage and feel the stitches Hannibal has placed on his body, and bleed into the bandage that Hannibal wrapped around him. He can’t imagine missing it.

Chapter End Notes

Coloratura:
When used in English, the term specifically refers to elaborate melody, particularly in vocal music and especially in operatic singing of the 18th and 19th centuries, with runs, trills, wide leaps, or similar virtuoso-like material.

Overture

Chapter Summary

After missing a chance at the opera, Franklyn introduces Tobias to Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The performance of *Dead Man Walking* is everything Hannibal hoped it would be. The story itself is of little interest: he has little faith in redemption, let alone that offered by a religious figure such as a nun. But Will's performance elevates the opera beyond the cliche subject matter.

There is a feralness in the singer's performance that was missing from *Tosca* . He can't help but speculate that the residual high of killing Stammets thrums through Will's blood even now. And Will's singing is less about repentance than it is about revelation: Hannibal thinks he can hear the real person behind the fictional killer that has stopped denying what he has done, what has shaped him. Hannibal wonders if he is the only one who notices that the emotion in the singing is the peace of self-acceptance rather than self-forgiveness.

And after seeing Will's portrayal of a murderer snapping and finally accepting what he has done, Hannibal ponders if he will break so beautifully in reality. Hannibal hasn't decided what he plans to do with Will, but there is certainly an appeal to watching him shatter and then reform.

Hannibal is still reveling in the emotional release of the performance when he finds himself among his fellow opera goers. The company is less rarified than that of the season's opening performance. A fact that is exemplified by his patient Franklyn Froideveaux's presence. The man hovers in the periphery until his presence is too obnoxious to ignore and Hannibal nods slightly at him.

Franklyn's face brightens and he immediately approaches. "Hi, Doctor Lecter!" His knuckles are white where clenched around the champagne flute and his mouth opens and closes as though he is unsure what else to say.

Hannibal merely waits. He has no interest in Franklyn's company, nor in setting him at ease.

Finally the nervous man stammers, "I...I wanted to introduce you to my friend Tobias. Where did he go?" Franklyn turns as though his mysterious friend would appear from the woodwork. Hannibal is unsurprised when he does not. His patient continues, "he seemed so interested in meeting you. I think you'd really like him."

Hannibal dearly hopes that Franklyn isn't intending to stay in the vicinity until his wayward friend reappears, but he is resigned to the unctuous company. To his great fortune, Chrissy, the stage manager, approaches the pair as soon as it becomes apparent that they are not engaged in anything more than the barest social pleasantries.

"Dr. Lecter, I'm pleased that you elected to attend tonight," she says simply, taking her cue from Hannibal and barely gracing Franklyn with a nod when he makes the required introductions.

Chrissy continues, "I wanted to thank you again, for seeing to Will earlier."

"It was no trouble at all, I assure you. I've noticed that Will has elected not to join us?"

"I actually wanted to ask you for help on that score. Will said that his injury was too distracting to allow him to represent the company."

"Oh?" Hannibal's voice invites her to continue.

"Well, he doesn't care to socialize after performances, so it's entirely possible he simply seized the excuse to avoid it, but I did hope you could check on him briefly and let me know if I need to get him to the hospital? For painkillers or anything?"

Hannibal accepts the offer of escape. “I don’t mind at all. I’m afraid that I find myself unwilling to continue socializing either.” Hannibal purposefully does not glance at Franklyn: the man would be oblivious, but Hannibal hardly wants more attention paid to the tenuous connection he has to his most frustrating patient. “He’s not left yet?”

“Oh no, I’m sure he hasn’t. He usually waits until the crowds have thinned before he leaves.” Chrissy wrings her hands- she’s clearly worried about the situation, and Hannibal has to remind himself that the FBI is not a good representative sample of how other people react to murder scenes. It’s entirely possible that until this afternoon, the stage manager had never seen a dead body before.

“Then I will go and check on him immediately. Franklyn, good to see you. I’m sure your friend will turn up.”

“I hope so. He had seemed so interested in you after he saw your picture.”

Hannibal does not follow up with that statement. He really does not want to know why Franklyn thought it was even remotely appropriate. Instead, he strides away towards the maze of the backstage.

To his surprise, Chrissy follows him, lightly touching his sleeve to get him to pause. “I really am sorry to pull you away from the gathering Dr. Lecter. It’s just that, we only have Will on contract for a year. If we don’t impress him, he’ll find another opera company to join, and I’m afraid this situation,” here she gestures widely, “will put him off, you know?”

“I will do my best to make sure he’s comfortable,” Hannibal says, then continues on his way.

Various stagehands pass by, but Hannibal’s assured stride and obvious familiarity with the area keep any from questioning his presence as they set upon the myriad arcane tasks that were behind a stage performance. The noises fall away as Hannibal approaches the hallway that leads to Will’s dressing room. Around the corner, he hears a door close and then footsteps walking in the opposite direction. Hoping he hadn’t missed the singer, Hannibal walks a bit faster.

He catches just a bare glimpse of the man in the hallway, enough to know that the tall black man was clearly not Will, but not even a glance at the man's face. Shrugging off the not-quite-encounter, Hannibal knocks firmly on the door.

To his surprise, Will's voice immediately calls, "Come in."

Hannibal accepts the verbal invitation and slowly opens the door. A rush of air exits the room, the whir of fans suggesting an attempt to clear out the events of the past afternoon. Hannibal takes a moment to scent the air. There is a faint hint of rosin that is almost overwhelmed by the aftermath of Stammets's death. The smell of blood and gunpowder still hang in the air; perhaps it has sunk in deep enough that the singer will always be preparing in the faint perfume of death.

Pushing the door the rest of the way open, Hannibal is taken aback by the sight in front of him. Will is shirtless, his back slick with sweat as he daubs himself with a towel. Glancing down, Hannibal notes the plain, unflattering boxers. Rather than hugging the singers lean form, they hang loosely, barely holding on to thin hips. It's all the more alluring for its complete lack of artifice. Although Will has his back to the door, Hannibal can see his face reflected in the mirror opposite, the clear eyes watching him widen slightly.

"Oh, Dr. Lecter- Hannibal- you were not who I was expecting. But you are of course welcome. Please, give me a moment to make myself a bit more presentable." Will drops the towel and grabs a pair of jeans laying on the dressing table. Hannibal politely averts his gaze, only watching the singer shimmy into his clothes covertly from the corner of his eye. Hannibal wonders who exactly Will had been expecting.

"Your stage manager asked me to check on you- she said that you were experiencing pain?" Hannibal moves a bit closer now that Will is facing him. Up close he can see faint rusty spots through the dressing on the wound.

"Yes, I was actually expecting her to show up and check on me. Christy thinks that all artists are incapable of looking after ourselves." Will grabs a plain white t-shirt and struggles to pull it on. He gasps slightly as he raises his arm, apparently pulling at the wound.

"Allow me," says Hannibal as takes hold of the shirt, holding it steady as he guides Will's arm. For all that he wants to run his hand along flesh, he keeps his touch clinical.

“Thanks,” Will mutters.

“Considering that you were unwilling to go to a hospital after being... accosted... by a serial killer, I tend to favor that understanding.” Will’s eyebrow twitches slightly at Hannibal’s word choice. “And she’s worried that you won’t renew your contract here in Baltimore.”

Will glances up, carefully creating the illusion of eye contact and offers, “she may be right to worry. I can’t say that I’ve found Baltimore or its inhabitants particularly engaging so far.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow and nods towards the floor that once held Stammets’s dead body.

“The dead hardly count, Hannibal.” Will’s smirk is slightly vicious. “I don’t find anyone here that interesting.” The implication that Hannibal isn’t interesting could not be more obvious.

But Hannibal is nothing if not confident. “You will.”

“Promises, promises.” The mild goading isn’t enough to incite his anger, but he does feel a slight rush of ire at Will’s dismissal. As Hannibal briefly embraces and dismisses his reaction, Will’s body language changes. His weight is carefully balanced on the balls of his toes, and unless Hannibal is mistaken, his right hand is braced to give him leverage if he needs to move quickly. Clearly the singer knows he’s poking something with fangs. He wonders what he’s done that has hinted at his true nature: Will has barely spent any time in his presence, yet he is already wary.

Rather than show any more of his true nature to the disturbingly perceptive man, Hannibal changes the subject. “That said, with your permission I’d like to prescribe you some painkillers and prophylactic antibiotics.” Hannibal knows that the sense of danger will linger in Will’s mind, but without reality to substantiate it, he can hope that it will begin to lose its force. Whatever he decides to do with Will in the future will be easier if the singer is not on his guard.

“I’m fine with over the counter pain medication. But I’ll accept the antibiotics.”

Hannibal nods while he pulls out the prescription pad he had intentionally brought. It occurs to him that he hadn’t heard the paramedic ask after Will’s vaccination status, nor had he asked himself. “I should have asked this earlier. Do you know when you last had a tetanus vaccination?”

“Three years ago.” Will says shortly.

Hannibal allows himself to raise an eyebrow skeptically. “I’m surprised you know that. Most people wouldn’t.”

“Trust me, I have good reason to remember why I needed a tetanus shot.” Hannibal watches as Will’s right hand circles around his left wrist. There is faint scarring that appears to circle the entire joint. When Will notices his gaze, he lowers his arms and starts to look through the room, eventually selecting a worn button-up shirt that he pulls on.

“Again, Hannibal, thank you for your time and care. I promise that I will make an appointment at a local clinic to have the cut examined and the stitches removed,” Will says as he packs up his bag.

Hannibal toys with the thought of offering to help Will carry his belongings to his vehicle, but elects to simply make his farewells and leave the singer on his own. He’s made enough of an initial impression and he doesn’t want to seem overly eager. Now he is best served by exercising patience. With Will’s profession and interest in art, he will not be able to avoid Hannibal’s company in the future. Far better to be seen as a bulwark against the rest of society than to be seen as someone to avoid.

Will Graham occupies the periphery of Hannibal’s mind in the coming days. A casual inquiry confirms that the FBI has officially declined to press charges in the Stammets case, and there are rumors that someone higher up in the agency is considering a bravery award for the singer as a way to score points with high society. Hannibal smirks at the thought of someone trying to tell Will that he has to stand in front of an audience to receive an award for his lovely act of violence.

If it happens, Hannibal is definitely going to attend.

Other than that inquiry, Hannibal is content to let his interest in William Graham rest. It's only a matter of time until their next encounter.

In spite of his decision, it's only a week after Stammets's death that the singer is brought to the forefront of his thoughts.

Hannibal keeps himself occupied with other thoughts any time Franklyn has an appointment. It's irritating that a man who is so easily diagnosed is so difficult to treat. The very fact that he's interested in anything Hannibal suggests undermines his ability to improve. Intentionally cultivating a distance even beyond his professional standard is both for Franklyn's benefit and Hannibal's own self-control.

Nonetheless, Hannibal is surprised out of his normal detachment when he opens the door to greet Franklyn and finds his patient accompanied by another man. The tall, well-dressed man next to Franklyn smiles calmly as he's introduced. He smells of rosin, entrails, and wood instruments. Hannibal makes a note to figure out where he recognizes the scent from.

"It's a shame that we didn't get a chance to meet at the opera last week," Tobias offers smoothly. "Franklyn was very eager to see us together, he rather thought we would have a great deal in common."

Hannibal nods and offers, "yes, Franklyn did mention he wanted to introduce me to a friend. He wasn't sure where you had wandered off to, but presumably you met up again after I was called away."

Tobias's smile turns sly, "I was just offering my congratulations to a member of the company, the performance was beyond all my expectations. I imagine you had a similar reaction to the new tenor."

He looks as though he's going to continue when Franklyn interrupts. "Tobias is a musician, you know? He really helped me understand the music."

A faint moue of distaste crosses Tobias's face, "the dream, of course, is to have a friend that understands me, can think like me and see the world the way I see it. I do believe the opera has pointed me in the right direction."

Franklyn puffs up with pride, clearly believing himself to be that friend.

Hannibal decides to end the conversation. "Friendships are invaluable. I'm afraid, however, this time is reserved for Franklyn's health-related needs. It was nice to meet you, Tobias."

The man nods his head and turns back towards the door he entered as Franklyn is ushered into the room.

"Would you like to further discuss our chance encounter at the opera?"

"It wasn't really chance. I mean, I know that you're a fan of the opera, but I thought that you attended the weekend performances, not that I've checked or anything. It just, when I started attending it occurred to me that you might like that sort of thing too, and we could talk about it."

Hannibal acknowledges, "I am a lover of both opera and classical music. Live performances have always been my preference." He pauses, and allows Franklyn to direct the conversation. They are rapidly approaching the point where his patient will try to cross enough lines that Hannibal will have to refer him elsewhere.

Franklyn manages to evade a referral yet again. "When I was there, at the end, with Tobias, I was going to introduce you right away. But then he left briefly- I was trying to get your attention, but not directly."

“I was aware of that,” Hannibal admits.

“I was so happy when you nodded in greeting- I thought you were going to pretend you didn’t see me,” here Franklyn pouts a bit, his face twisting in a mockery of coy upset that makes him look like a toddler about to have a tantrum. “It felt like you were rejecting me…”

Truthfully, Hannibal had considered doing just that. It was only Franklyn’s apparent isolation that finally prompted him to acknowledge the man- Hannibal wasn’t going to sacrifice his reputation for graciousness just to avoid a single encounter.

“I was unsure the best action to take, Franklyn. It would be unethical to approach a patient or acknowledge in any way our relationship outside this room until that patient gives consent.”

“I don’t really know who you are outside this room.”

“I’m your psychiatrist.” Hannibal knows that Franklyn won’t take the hint, but enough repetition might finally break through the man’s willful blindness.

“I want you to be my friend,” says Franklyn, as though that should be enough to cajole Hannibal into compliance.

Hannibal manages not to sigh or roll his eyes. Instead, he responds, “of course you do. I have intimate knowledge of you.”

Sadly, Franklyn seems to take the phrasing as an invitation. There are times when the nuances of Hannibal’s word choices are lost on the less observant. “And you like the same things I do. I think we’d be good friends. It makes me sad I have to pay you.”

It makes Hannibal sad to realize that no payment could be enough to endure Franklyn as a patient. If it were not for his professional pride as a gifted psychiatrist, he would already be looking for someone to refer Franklyn to.

So he redirects the conversation. “Tell me about Tobias.”

Fortunately, this is enough to derail Franklyn’s attempts to ingratiated himself to Hannibal. Like a child describing a shiny new toy, Franklyn eagerly begins to speak. “Tobias is my best friend.” He pauses, then continues, “but sometimes I worry that I am not Tobias’s best friend. In fact, until we were all just speaking, I didn’t realize he was looking at me as someone who could understand him.” His eyes go wide in wonder, as though the revelation is unspeakably wonderful.

Hannibal does not break his illusion.

“I knew that it would be music that would really make us friends- and meeting you at the opera would have just made it even better. It took so long! He has cancelled on me so many times. He almost didn’t come to the show. But now I doubt he’ll miss another show.”

Hannibal is not surprised after the way Tobias spoke of his enjoyment, but he gamely asks, “why do you say that?

Franklyn’s face falls, his earlier elation draining from him like water from a shattered urn. “He hasn’t stopped talking about the lead singer from the opera.”

The interest Tobias alluded to comes sharply to the forefront of Hannibal’s mind. “William Graham?”

“Yeah- apparently the man killed someone and still performed on the same day. Tobias hasn’t stopped talking about how remarkable he is...how much an artist like that can see in other people.”

“And this upsets you?” Hannibal asks.

“It makes me think that he wants to be the other guy’s friend.” Franklyn’s eyes tear up and Hannibal offers him a box of tissues, carefully making sure his hand would not contact the other man’s skin.

“There is nothing wrong with having more than one friend, Franklyn. Just because Tobias is interested in someone else doesn’t mean that he’s not your friend.” Then Hannibal cannot resist probing, “has he even met Mr. Graham, or is he just enamored with an artist on a distant stage?”

Instead of answering the question, Franklyn reverts to his earlier complaints. “But he’s my only friend! I mean, I’m a great friend- if people- if you’d, just give me a chance, I’d be a good friend for you too. Then maybe I wouldn’t get so upset about Tobias.” The last is offered hopefully.

“I am a source of stability and clarity, Franklyn, not your friend.”

Franklyn snaps back, “well, the singer should be a source of inspiration for Tobias, not his friend either.

“Oh?”

Franklyn needs little prodding to continue. “But he wasn’t content with that. He actually went and met him, and now it’s all he’ll talk about. He’s been talking about showing him how well he plays, inviting him to share their interests. I hate it! Why does he need more than me?”

It takes a moment for Hannibal to untangle that, before deciding that Tobias had expressed a desire to impress Will. “Why do you think we try to get close to people who inspire us, Franklyn?

“We just want to touch greatness.”

Hannibal is surprised at Franklyn's insight. It is the last interesting thing the man says during that session. The appointment ends with Hannibal still unable to cut the man loose.

Jack calls a few days later to say that a dead body had been turned into a cello and staged at the opera house, complete with the music for Will's major solos.

Chapter End Notes

Some of the dialogue between Franklyn and Hannibal is adapted from the show.

Continuo

Chapter Summary

A man has been turned into a cello. Jack is not amused.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Dr. Lecter, thank you for coming, I realize the timing may be inconvenient," says Jack with as much warmth as could ever be found in his voice.

Hannibal nods in greeting, keeping his interest in the murder submerged. "As I have said before, I am pleased to offer my help. I am, however, uncertain why I am here?" Hannibal gestures at the Opera House looming before them. "You said there was a crime scene, but I am hardly needed for the forensics. And typically photographs are sufficient for profiling."

"My people have the crime scene well in hand, Doctor. I have a specific task in mind for you." Jack leads Hannibal inside, heading towards the main stage.

"Please, elaborate."

Jack sighs as though aggrieved. "We have one of the opera singers coming in to identify the music at the crime scene. I want you to monitor his reactions." Jack pauses at the entrance to the theatre, turning to look squarely at Hannibal.

"He is a suspect? Which singer would this be?"

Jack's eyeroll suggests that Hannibal's professed ignorance is less than convincing. "The one I mentioned in the call, the same one as last time. William Graham."

“So you want my eyes on him to see how he reacts? What precisely are you expecting, Jack?” Internally, Hannibal muses that Jack occasionally offered rare gifts without coming close to realizing their value.

“I’m not certain,” he admits. “But I managed to convince the head of the opera to call him in since the sheet music is all solos that he sings for the opera. The scene has barely been touched.”

“Jack, you do realize that you are intending to further traumatize a man who has already been the victim of a serial killer, correct? He was forced to defend himself with lethal force: that is not something that is easy for a person to accept.”

“Doctor Lecter, this tableau was either set up by William Graham or in his honor. I need to know which. Some mental stress is a small price to pay for the information we need to solve this crime.”

Hannibal had more than one argument he could make at this juncture. The chance to see Will reacting to the scene personally holds his tongue.

Still, he has a role to play. “I do hope you’ve discussed this with William’s stage manager or director, someone with a personal connection to him? It would be supremely unfair to conduct this experiment and not be prepared to provide some sort of emotional support.”

Jack looks rather shifty, and Hannibal concludes that these precautions have not been taken. Truly, Jack seems content to skirt proper protocol and courtesy once he decides a person is a suspect. It will come back to haunt him eventually.

“That’s the other reason why you’re here,” admits Jack. “I was told that with your affiliation with the opera board and your medical background, you’d be the best to oversee this.”

With that, Jack finally opens the door. A single spotlight is centered around a man who has been carefully crafted into an instrument. A music stand is perched in front of the makeshift cello; the music for Will’s solos are presumably on the stand. Fascinated, Hannibal moves closer. He has some time to look before Will arrives.

It may not have the same dark humor as his own work, but there is definitely art to be found in this performance.

It takes some arguing, but Hannibal manages to convince Jack to clear most of the room when Will arrives. The singer was led to the side entrance- the one he's most familiar with. Hannibal is on the far side of the stage: easily overlooked considering the spotlight and dead body, but not actually hidden.

The door opens and Will steps out onto the stage, Jack following several feet behind, his eyes intent on the singer's body language. He's dressed casually, the same style of worn clothing Hannibal has seen before. The saving grace to his outfit is the flattering wool overcoat that hides the rumpled shirt. This time, Will looks more as though he's rolled directly out of bed. There was a performance last night, Hannibal recalls, so Jack's early morning call probably did wake him.

Hannibal watches as Will steps to the edge of the pool of light. He says nothing, merely staring directly at the body. He ignores the sheet music. He does not look surprised, but neither does he show any pleasure. Jack would find little foothold for his suspicions.

After a moment's pause, Will steps closer, not touching, just feet from the corpse. His eyes slide shut, and Hannibal moves slightly closer so he can watch Will's face. Rapid movement is barely visible under the lids, as though he is in a waking dream.

Jack looks as though he's going to burst with confusion that is turning into anger. Whatever reaction he hoped to see, this isn't it. Before he says anything, Hannibal catches his eye and raises a finger to his lips. Jack frowns, but says nothing, content to continue watching the singer react to the tableau.

Will's eyes open, and still saying nothing, he moves off of the stage, finally descending to the floor and taking a front row seat. His arms spread, and he appears to relax before his eyes close again.

When the singer's hands begin to move as though he's holding something, Hannibal closes the distance, leaving Jack on the stage. The whispers are almost inaudible, but Hannibal catches the line, "I open the throat from inside using the neck of a cello."

The first person narrative, the movements- Hannibal realizes he is witnessing the singer step empathically into the killer's shoes. He's not just understanding it, Hannibal marvels, he's living it. Hannibal wants to watch the entire crime scene though the micro expressions on Will's face and the comments he probably doesn't realize he's verbalizing. Sadly, Hannibal is not the only audience to Will's empathic experience.

Hannibal is well aware that Will did not kill this man; he will not allow Jack to come close enough to hear the muttering and come to a different conclusion. He reaches out, cautiously, and places a firm hand on Will's shoulder.

The abruptness of Will's movement takes Hannibal off-guard. His wrist is seized in both of Will's hands. Will, who is stepping into Hannibal's space, twisting, using his body to its greatest advantage to leverage Hannibal's arm behind his back.

Hannibal does not resist the movement, allowing Will to manhandle him into an armlock. He is surprised when the movement immediately evolves into a pain compliance hold to maximize Will's control over a larger opponent.

Jack's startled shout breaks the moment. With a gasp, Will's grip tightens to bruising levels for a moment before it's dropped entirely and the man steps away.

"I'm sorry, I have an exaggerated startle response," mutters Will. Hannibal is enchanted to notice that there is slight color in his cheekbones- the singer is blushing- an unexpectedly sweet reaction. "Physical contact when I'm not fully conscious isn't a good idea."

Hannibal wants to ask how that impacted Will's interpersonal relationships, especially with lovers. He refrains.

"And extensive training in self-defense if that is your startle response," interjects Jack. "That was the same technique they teach in the Marines." Hannibal knew Jack had a military

background- he hadn't realized it was with the Marines. That will be something to keep in mind if they ever have a physical confrontation.

Will nods in agreement. "I wasn't aware it was from the Marines. I did learn it in a self-defense program."

"Why did you train in self-defense?" asks Hannibal curiously. He is sure that the singer is downplaying his training. That type of reflex takes time to settle into a body.

Hannibal can feel Will trying to recapture the fragile act he put on following Stammets's death. The singer's adrenaline must still be running high, because the facade barely conceals the active interest in his gaze as he looks at the murder scene. Hannibal resolves to make certain that Will sees the next Ripper display.

"First, I think everyone should train in self-defense. Second, I had to take a class that improved my understanding of fighting so I could perform better. It happened to be what was offered when I needed it." Will shrugs easily.

"Perform better?" asks Jack.

"On stage? Do you know how many operas have fight scenes? And how hard it is to sing while following choreography."

Jack nods. His face is still stoney with suspicion. Will's odd reaction did nothing to remove him as Jack's suspect.

"But nevermind that. I was told I needed to identify some music. Can you explain why I came to this? It couldn't have waited until the body was taken?" Will's transition into a traumatized victim has finished. As he is now, Hannibal knows he will be able to explain away his reaction as someone in a daze at the macabre scene.

"Where were you last night?" asks Jack instead of answering.

“Are you...are you serious? Am I a suspect?” The incredulity in his voice rings false to Hannibal. Obviously the man knows that he’s being watched with an eye to pinning this on him.

“Answer the question and I can answer yours.”

Will licks his lips while Hannibal and Jack watch him pull together the proper explanation. “Last night I performed, as I’m sure you’re already aware. Yesterday afternoon a... fan I suppose you’d call him, made an uncomfortable advance,” Will mumbles the last part; reliving the moment perhaps?

“Something that needs to be reported, Mr. Graham?” Interjects Hannibal smoothly. There is no reason to alienate Will by obviously siding with Jack.

“No- he just asked me if I would be available today to look at some of his artwork, and that if I liked it, he’d be happy to gift me with future works.” Only by watching closely does Hannibal catch Will’s eyes flicker to the corpse when he says artwork. Puzzle pieces begin to slot together in his mind.

“I declined, but it reminded me that I have a couple outstanding requests for art appraisals. I’m a bit out of practice, so I went to a client who has a private collection of artwork- he always has new pieces for me to look at. I was there until I received a call this morning asking me to come here.” The words are spoken quickly, but so clearly articulated that Hannibal has no trouble understanding. It manages to keep Jack from interrupting with questions.

“Does this friend have a name?” Jack scoffs.

“Of course,” Will smirks back. “But rather than set you up to cause an international incident, I’ll just say that I spent the night in DC at the Italian Embassy. I’m sure video surveillance and security will confirm my whereabouts. I can call them and give my permission to confirm my arrival and departure times.”

Huffing, Jack promises to check up on the alibi and storms out of the room. With an embassy vouching for him, even asking questions about Will's nocturnal activities would cause waves in the bureau: after Stammets dying, Jack hardly wants his superiors to doubt his judgement.

Hannibal pauses before following Jack. "The fan who wished for you to look at his art, does he have a name?" There is no doubt in his mind that the author of this work and the fan Will is speaking of are the same person. He wonders if the singer will offer up the name.

"It would be rather odd if he didn't," smiles Will. Hannibal notes he's looking back at the corpse.

"I didn't take you for someone who attempted to use humor to deflect." Hannibal squints; he doesn't think Will is seeing the body as it is. He's seeing something beyond what's on display in the spotlight.

"Well I'm full of surprises. Yes he has a name, no I won't share it. I expect I'll hear more from him in the future though. He didn't strike me as a man who would give up after one gift." The way Will's mouth shapes the word gift makes Hannibal swallow involuntarily. It is a combination of interest and leashed violence.

"Was there something specific about his request that made you drive for over an hour late at night to obtain an unimpeachable alibi, Will?" He wants to directly ask if the artist warned Will or if Will managed to intuit the results of the gift-giving.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're suggesting Hannibal."

Apparently Jack stormed out of the theatre and straight back to his office. Hannibal allows himself to feel annoyance and show it on his face as he walks in to discuss the morning's activities with Jack.

Jack ignores the irritation and simply waves him to a seat across from his own.

“Jack, I still question the necessity of this morning’s events. We could have checked his alibi before exposing him to that scene. It was unusually cruel to do that.”

Jack is shaking his head before Hannibal finishes. “I needed to be sure, Dr. Lecter. We both know that alibis can be falsified. Obviously I didn’t expect him to have multiple recordings and an ambassador to support his. Had I known, you’re right, I would have skipped that scene.”

So Jack had spent his time checking on Will’s alibi. Not surprising, Hannibal supposes.

“Is there a deeper reason for this suspicion, Jack? William Graham seems rather delicate- certainly not the first person I would pick out as a suspect, especially after his breakdown with Stammets.”

Jack scowls. “He manhandled you fairly easily.”

Hannibal refuses to rise to the bait. “But you did not know that he would have that kind of reaction before you saw it. Even his self-defense was to immobilize, not to harm.”

Jack pulls out a key and unlocks one of the desk drawers before responding. The metallic click of the lock and the slide of the rails nearly cover his first words. “It’s important for a law enforcement officer to never stop learning. At least, that was what I was told when I joined the FBI. So I have a contact in Interpol that I regularly review cases with- half complaining and half collaborating.”

“That strikes me as a valuable relationship to cultivate.” The morning has been an embarrassment of riches, Hannibal admits to himself. Beyond seeing a piece of art, he managed to see Will’s reaction to said art. Now he has learned two valuable pieces of information should Jack ever become an enemy- Marine training and Interpol connections have been added to Hannibal’s image of the man.

“Well, we were going over recent cases a couple days ago and I mentioned that an opera singer managed to solve one of them, well not solve. Resolve I guess. And he mentioned Graham by name.”

“I take it that he is not an opera aficionado?”

“No.” The laugh sounds forced. “He’s based out of Paris, but opera is not really his entertainment of choice.”

“And yet when he heard an opera singer was involved in the death of a serial killer, he thought to mention William Graham.” Hannibal is intrigued- there has been no hint of this around the singer, no gossip from Chilton or anyone else.

“Exactly,” says Jack. “He told me that three years ago he had an extremely unusual case that also had an opera singer as a victim that ended in death. He sent me the file. I received it last night.”

“May I review it?” asks Hannibal. Will’s last tetanus shot was three years ago, Hannibal recalls.

“I rather hoped you would,” Jack responds. He pulls a folder from the previously locked drawer and slides it across the desk to the psychiatrist.

Hannibal opens the file, skipping past the written reports to the pictures. The first is of an otherwise dingy-white wall that has blood from at least two artiel sprays. Enough to come from multiple people. The second photo is a closeup of a part of the wall that had been spared most of the blood splatter. A heavy iron ring is set into the wall at about waist-height. One half of a pair of handcuffs dangle from where it is latched to the ring- the other half apparently cut off.

The third photo is the most interesting yet. Long practice keeps Hannibal’s face impassive rather than fascinated. Clearly taken before the first two, this one contained the bodies that splashed blood across the wall. Three people lay slumped against the baseboards, close to, but not on top of the area with the iron ring. It is a toss up whether they all died to blood loss

or direct organ trauma. At least one had had his throat ripped out. A knife is barely visible under one body, another still clutches a different blade.

It is lovely in its savagery.

Knowing that Jack expects a response, Hannibal says “if he caused this, why was he never charged?” Surely if there had been a hint of scandal involving bloody murders, it would have stayed with the singer even in another country years later.

“First, the three dead were known criminals- art thieves by trade, and it appeared to everyone that they were trying their hand at hostage taking for profit. It was assumed that they expected Graham to have a wealthy patron who would pay a quiet ransom to get him back.”

Hannibal thinks to Will’s aggressively modest dressing and wonders if his style had changed or if the thieves were merely blind. “And your friend disagreed?”

“No, he actually does think they were criminals: it's why he was on the case. Interpol wouldn't have been brought in for a triple homicide, no matter how bloody.”

“So why didn't Interpol bring in Mr. Graham? Even if the dead were art thieves, their deaths would be investigated,” Hannibal pushes.

“The locals botched up the scene.” Jack’s upper lip curls in disdain. “This was in a small town called- Colmar, I think? Not Paris. When they pulled Graham out of there and realized Interpol would need to handle the artifacts they found, the forensics were too muddled to determine who exactly fought. All of the dead were armed with edged weapons, and they were all bloody.”

Interesting. “What did Mr. Graham have to say about it?”

“That’s the thing. When they found him, he was chained to the wall, covered in blood not his own, and running a fever that was cooking his brain. Even rumors were quashed in the

interest of patient confidentiality and victim protection. Interpol was lucky to even get a diagnosis."

Hannibal refuses to allow himself to imagine the scene under Jack's occasionally insightful gaze. But thinking back to Will rubbing the scar on his wrist makes him eager to put the whole picture together. He pulls his mind back to the medical information offered.

"Encephalitis?" asks Hannibal as though the cooked brain description wasn't a complete give away.

Jack pulls the file towards him and flips back to the written report. "Anti-NMDA encephalitis to be exact. Very good doctor."

"And since encephalitis can cause hallucinations, seizures, confusion, loss of time, he couldn't tell the investigators anything?" Clever, clever boy- such a condition would excuse any number of bad acts and mistaken memories.

"By the time he was interviewed, the locals had already told him what happened- he basically repeated their stories and didn't add anything else." Hannibal treasures the frustration in Jack's voice. "And even if he had admitted to killing everyone there, there is no way any charges would have stuck. Apparently no doctor who saw the case would commit to testifying that he was responsible for any actions taken. Everyone hushed it up to save face- the story of the art thieves fighting and managing to kill each other leaked; Graham's presence was erased."

"This is fascinating, Jack, but I still question its probative value. In this case, as with Stammets, it seems as though Mr. Graham was in the wrong place, wrong time, and took action to save himself. With savage efficiency apparently." Hannibal hopes the admiration he feels doesn't leak into his voice. It's surprisingly hard to control himself at the thought that Will's body count is far more than one.

"There is nothing in this behavior that would suggest he create a display such as the one we saw this morning. These photos, they're brutal, but hardly planned, let alone artistic. Is he linked to any other deaths?" asks Hannibal.

“Nothing concrete,” Jack admits. “Apparently there have been rumors that he attracts a certain type of person. But even without those rumors, I wanted to make sure Stammets wasn’t the tipping point.”

“You were concerned that he had a psychotic break and started turning people into cellos? His behavior this morning certainly was not indicative of such.”

“But his behavior wasn’t normal. Did he tell you anything else after I left the room?”

“Nothing of substance. Perhaps he merely zoned out at the macabre spectacle.” Hannibal wishes he could have let Will ramble on and begin to peel back the layers of his mind.

“Or perhaps he’s been getting into his role too much and wanted to increase his experience.” After Stammets’s death Jack must have read about the singer’s unusual gift.

“Jack- he has an established alibi.” Hannibal’s tone offers no room for disagreement.

“I’m still worried about his stability. There is something fragile about him,” Jack murmurs sympathetically. Hannibal wants to laugh at the attempt to rationalize the morning’s activities as concern for Will. For all that Jack can be brash, he can also manipulate quite well.

Of course, Hannibal is not going to follow Jack’s lead in rewriting history. “And now we’ve further destabilized him.”

“Given what he’s been exposed to, do you think the opera company will agree to mandated counseling for him?” Jack asks hopefully.

“Perhaps.” Definitely. “There are a few psychiatrists I could recommend.” Not that Hannibal would suggest anyone else. “One of my colleagues is particularly experienced with PTSD. He did mention an exaggerated startle response.”

“I want you to do it.”

“Jack...you realize if I take him on as a patient, I cannot tell you anything that I learn. I value patient confidentiality.” It’s true. Patient privacy and confidentiality are important. Hannibal takes pride in excelling in all areas. He’s not going to sacrifice his role as a doctor to Jack’s interest in building a profile about someone who is no longer a suspect.

“I am aware Doctor Lecter. But I am also aware that your insights will be able to spot a danger far sooner than most other psychiatrists. And confidentiality can be broken if there is the threat of imminent harm.” Given the bloody pictures, Hannibal can grant that Jack’s concern is reasonable.

Still, he warns, “there is a pretty high bar to meet imminent threat, Jack.”

“It would still be a comfort to know that you were the one looking for it.” He tries to break the tension by adding, “I need my beauty sleep. I don’t want to stay awake worrying about William Graham.”

“I can see your point. I will do my best to encourage the stage manager to send him for counseling. I’d rather the director or the opera board itself not become involved.” Hannibal can just see Chilton trying to slither his way into working with Will.

“Oh?”

“Do you really want to this to become gossip fodder?” Hannibal keeps his tone to light exasperation. “We’ve spent the morning on a dead end. Perhaps now is not the time for socialites with too much time and too much curiosity to try to access the investigation of poor Mr. Wilson’s death.”

Hannibal stands to depart. Reluctantly, he places the photos still on the desk back into the file and offers it to Jack.

Without a word, Jack slides it back: non-verbal permission to review the rest of the file.

"Please let me know how that turns out. I need to go see if forensics has learned anything new. We'll be constructing the profile over the next few days. Any insights you have to offer would be welcome."

Chapter End Notes

Posting this at 3:00 am since I just finished writing the chapter. It may not have been a good decision, but my judgment begins to fail around 1:00 am.

CONTINUO: An extemporized chordal accompaniment for recitativo secco, usually by a harpsichord, cello or double bass.

Cover

Chapter Summary

Will's first appointment with Hannibal, Hannibal's trip to Tobias's store, and Hannibal deciding to test Will's abilities.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Since seeing Will's reaction to the human cello, Hannibal has poured over the file Jack had received from Interpol. Other than the encephalitis, Will had shown signs of dehydration, severe bruising and cuts from where he had been handcuffed, a stab wound to his upper thigh and miscellaneous other scrapes. The police were called in response to screams audible in neighboring apartments; considering that Will was nearly catatonic when help arrived shortly thereafter, Will's injuries were accepted as damage from the fight, his actions written off as self-defense, and the case closed.

Any further treatment would be in his medical records, and had not been passed onto the police. As soon as Will had made an appointment to meet with him for therapy, Hannibal had put in a request for those records to be sent to him. He's looking forward to a more in depth view of Will's physical state.

The absences in the file are what grate at Hannibal's nerves. Reading between the lines, it's clear the police and Interpol alike were more interested in the stolen art and the pieces missing from the recovered collections. There is no explanation of how the trio managed to kidnap Will, nor even information on *when* he was taken. There is no attempt to explain the staggered times of death. Liver temperature readings were not exact, and rigor mortis could vary: the coroner had ruled that the variations of calculated times of death were just the natural consequence of inexact methods.

But the more Hannibal looked at the pictures and the blood coagulation, the more he began to think that the three deaths did not occur at the same time.

Hannibal is not empathic by nature. He cannot step into Will's shoes and see the events the way the singer does. But he does have a powerful imagination. If he were immobilized,

weakened by illness and outnumbered, there would be limited options for how to escape. Given the officer's report that described Will as covered in blood, Hannibal began to wonder if Will had played dead in order to lure his captors close enough to strike one at a time.

The more logical explanation is that the captors turned on each other and Will managed to survive on the crossfire. It's rather less satisfying though.

Throughout all of his research and speculation, Hannibal has been trying to decide what to do with Will. There are still layers he wants to see, but it isn't until Bedelia points out that he wants to be seen in turn that the answer comes to him.

For the first time since his becoming, Hannibal sees the chance for real, reciprocal friendship or even something more. The thought is almost intoxicating. He desperately hopes that the man lives up to his potential. Only time, and carefully crafted encounters with the more hidden aspects of Hannibal's life, will reveal whether the singer is worthy of joining him.

Two days after the presentation of the human cello, Hannibal opens the door to his office precisely at 11:00 am. He had of course heard the entrance of his newest patient ten minutes earlier: there was no reason to expose his own eagerness for Will's appointment. The anticipation is delicious.

When he sees Will, he is momentarily taken aback at the man's appearance. He had heard that Will's understudy had taken on the last few performances while the opera house reviewed security measures at the theatre. Rather than risk the tenor's safety, he had been politely banished from the stage. Apparently, Will has taken the lack of performances as a chance to let his facial hair grow.

As if to counter the informality of his stubble, Will's halo of curls has been tamed into some semblance of order. Moreover, he is dressed in a well-tailored shirt and slacks, topped with the longer coat Hannibal had already admired. The combination abandons Will's innocent visage for a more mature look that Hannibal finds far more attractive. Before Will's attire was an announcement that he lacked a wealthy patron. His appearance now shows he doesn't need the protection of one.

In public, Will had presented himself as prey, but he came to Hannibal's office as a predator in his own right. On the one hand, the fact that Will doesn't want to appear as prey in front of Hannibal suggests that the man has already seen past his person-suit. On the other hand, Will is still here after seeing a glimpse of Hannibal's reality.

All of this is taken in as Hannibal ushers Will through the door.

"Will, I hope you are doing better than the last time I saw you. Please, make yourself comfortable." It's always interesting to see which patients will immediately sit down, and which ones will familiarize themselves with the office. Will falls into the latter category. He prowls restlessly across the room, clearly not interested in sitting down anytime soon.

"Thank you, Dr. Lecter." Since Will's back is turned, he allows himself to frown at the formality of address.

"You may still call me Hannibal."

"Seems a bit unprofessional. Aren't you supposed to be a bit more aloof as a psychiatrist?" There is more than a touch of humor in the statement and question. The hint of flirtation in his voice also helps soothe Hannibal's annoyance at the accusation.

Though, to be fair, Hannibal's goals really *aren't* professional, so he can probably credit that to Will's insight rather than to rudeness.

"You're here because you had a traumatic experience compounded by further exposure to violence. Chrissy wants to make sure you have the tools you need to process your experiences." And he would provide those tools. But more importantly, he would begin to establish ties and intimacy between him and Will. Hannibal settles into his chair and waits while Will moves towards the window.

"I'd hardly call what I saw two days ago violence," Will scoffs.

“You do not consider a murdered body violence?”

“Not really,” Will admits. He finally strolls away from the window that had held his attention and drops into the seat set up across from Hannibal.

Hannibal keeps his face neutral. “Would you care to elaborate?”

Will’s eyes narrow. “You already know.” It is not a question.

“What is it I know?” Hannibal refuses to give up the game that easily.

“You tell me,” counters Will.

The conversation is getting rather circular, and Hannibal wants to hear Will’s thoughts about the killer. It’s worth ceding this part of the match. “I have received information about you during the course of my consulting with the FBI, but a second hand report hardly paints a full picture.”

“Is it not sufficient to know that I don’t consider a dead body to be enough violence to as you said, compound my trauma?”

“Do you consider yourself traumatized, Will?”

“Not particularly.” A small, secretive smile flits across his features.

“How do you feel?” It’s a standard question, but for once Hannibal truly wants to know the answer.

“About Stammets or about the scene at the opera house?” Will stand abruptly, peels off his coat and drapes it over the nearby chaise.

Happy that the singer is making himself comfortable, Hannibal elects to guide the conversation. “Let us speak first about what happened two days ago.”

“Two days ago I was called in to look at music and I was ambushed into seeing a dead body that had been turned into an instrument,” answers Will flatly. “I feel annoyed that I was dragged in after I already had a very late night.”

“Understandable reaction. But that is a reaction to the FBI’s action. How did you feel about the scene itself?”

Will frowns. They both know it’s not a question for Will’s supposed therapy. “Sometimes it’s hard to separate out how I felt and how the killer felt.”

“The morning at the opera house, you were murmuring to yourself before you were interrupted.”

“Was I? I’m afraid your interruption derailed my thoughts at that point.”

“What did you see when you saw the late Mr. Wilson?” Will has evaded the question in different forms neatly, but Hannibal knows all the conversational tricks a person can use.

“Was that his name? I merely knew him as a rather terrible trombonist.”

Hannibal makes a soft noise of approval that Will is actually starting to answer the question. He then asks, “His talents did not lay in music?”

Will’s eyes flutter shut. “Had to open him up to get a decent sound out of him.”

“It sounds as though you believe the killer was trying to make music, not just display the body visually.”

“He was certainly performing for someone.” Will’s eyes have remained closed.

“You,” says Hannibal. “At least, that is what the FBI believes.”

Will’s voice goes dreamy when he answers “a properly treated instrument can give voice to death.” He opens his eyes. “In this case, the man’s body was such an instrument. Do you play, Doctor Lecter?” At Hannibal’s slight frown, he amends, “do you play, Hannibal?”

Few people would have noticed the small shift in expression, so Hannibal answers, “I play several instruments. But I am most inclined towards the harpsichord and the theremin.”

Will raises an eyebrow at the latter. “Your accent...Baltic?”

“You have a good ear. Yes.” He does not elaborate.

“Interesting that you play an instrument developed by the Soviets.” There is no accusation or judgement, just honest curiosity. Given the occupation of the Baltic nations by the USSR, Hannibal doesn’t blame him.

“It is worth finding something beautiful to salvage out of something ugly.” He weighs the offer for a moment before saying, “perhaps one day I will play for you.” There is a sudden sharpening of Will’s gaze, before his eyes widened almost imperceptibly. Hannibal feels frozen under the examination, as though Will has pierced the veil that shrouds him.

Finally, Will speaks quietly, “the finest artists can use raw materials and make something unspeakably lovely.”

“This is true,” Hannibal responds. He knows his voice is too passionate, but the reverence with which Will speaks of the transformation of the ugly into the sublime is unaccountably moving.

“Though we were speaking of music. Do you play, Will?”

“Learning an instrument was a part of my training.” Not too surprising, Hannibal admits. There had been gossip that Will was chosen as a singer at a young age - piano or other accompanying instruments would benefit such training.

“The cello perhaps? You did receive one as a gift.” Hannibal wants any insight Will can offer into himself or the killer trying to court his attention.

“It’s a compelling gift,” Will says after thinking it over. “Though this was more selfish than I think you believe. It was presented as a gift for me, but the killer’s design was to make his own music. To show off. It’s a very one-sided request for friendship. A request for a specific audience rather than an equal.”

“So not the cello.”

Hannibal’s dry delivery surprises a laugh out of Will. “No, I can play the piano, but I prefer the harp. It’s mentioned in my official biography if he had done any research.”

Hannibal nods in acknowledgement. “I refrained from reading what has been published. I would rather hear from you what you find important. So your admirer should have looked at your interests?”

“The killer wants me to understand his design, but in making his display, he shows no sign that he understands mine.” Hannibal wants to ask Will more about his design, but it is too early to push for that information. By grouping himself in with another killer, Will has revealed enough for Hannibal to build on later.

“The music? He selected the works you are singing here in Baltimore.”

Will shakes his head. “An afterthought- again, he chose songs that I have sung professionally rather than anything that is personal to me.”

“But he was playing for you?”

“Perhaps- it was an overture. An elaborate one.” Will bites his lower lip before finishing, “yes, it was for me. I was to be the listener.”

“Are you concerned that a killer is trying to capture your attention?” Will has shown no signs of concern thus far.

“He has not threatened me.” Hannibal thinks about the bloody folders, Stammets, and his own incapacitation at Will’s hands. Will’s lack of concern makes sense, he admits to himself.

“Not yet. Though you mentioned that he was not treating you as an equal. Do you want to be his equal, considering his choice in materials?”

Will’s answer uncovers the deeper meaning of the question. “I’ve already killed someone, Hannibal. If part of my therapy is learning to accept that, I do not require any help.”

“Killing someone in self-defense is different. Stammets was holding you at gunpoint,” Hannibal says,

“We both know that I wasn’t just talking about Stammets.”

“My understanding was the investigation into the...incident 3 years ago was inconclusive.”

There is a small, knowing smirk gracing Will's lips. "Well, let us just say that I am not worried about whether I am an equal to this artist."

"You mentioned that you did not think this would be the only gift you received." Will hadn't said that, Hannibal knows.

"Dr. Lecter, I think you are mixing up what I told you and Agent Crawford. I mentioned that a fan wanted to show me his art and gift me with future works. I certainly didn't say he was the killer."

"Of course not, my mistake for confusing the two," it was a weak attempt on Hannibal's part to gain more information. He is still disappointed it failed.

"Though perhaps we have gone too far afield. Do you have any other feelings about the display? Other than that it was directed at you?"

"It was grotesquely beautiful. If I thought the he had put any effort into personalizing the display for me, I'd call it Southern Gothic. I am from Louisiana. And it did show skilled craftsmanship and creativity." Hannibal does not allow himself to frown in displeasure. The idea that some other would-be artist has captured Will's attention before he has produced any Ripper scenes frustrates him. He's already possessive of the singer's attention, he marvels.

"So the serenade was a success?" Hannibal is forced to ask. He's not put too much effort into identifying the killer. If Will's response is too favorable, he will have to change that.

"Honestly? Right now I can still hear what he was playing behind my eyes. I find it interesting." Will's eyes flash with wicked glee. He knows that Hannibal is recalling his earlier taunt implying that he did not find Hannibal interesting.

"Interesting enough to keep you in Baltimore?" Hannibal's voice is a study in neutrality, as though Will potentially leaving was a minor concern at most.

“We'll see. He might be no more interesting than the most recent killer who tried to get my attention.” There is something off in that statement, and Hannibal resolves to think more about it when he gets a chance.

“And what you seek is something more.”

“Yes, Stammets sought me out so I could understand him. This killer may be the same. A real friendship must have at least some level of equality. I want an equal.”

“Someone who sees you as you see them.”

“Exactly.”

Hannibal knows the feeling.

Franklyn’s emergency appointment the next day answers many questions. It is probably the person who introduced them that made Hannibal discount Tobias previously. But having Franklyn pass on his desire to ‘cut somebody’s throat and play it like a violin,’ makes it clear that Tobias is the killer Jack seeks.

The one playing for Will.

And now that he has identified the man as Will’s admirer, he decides to meet with him in person. A trip to the man’s music store is simple enough, and easily explained away should Tobias ever be caught out. The conversation does nothing more than confirm that Tobias had killed more than one person in the past, and was most likely selling human intestines as catgut strings. It’s when they started discussing Will Graham that things got interesting.

“You know, I had considered you as a potential friend.” Tobias is coiling piano wire casually as they speak. It’s not very subtle as far as threats go, and Hannibal has to admire his directness.

“Really, did Franklyn tell you so much that you were intrigued?”

“Franklyn spoke about you so much that I was going to kill you.” The smile is a baring of the teeth. Tobias clearly hates Franklyn, even as the man fed his need for admiration and attention. Tobias’s pursuit of Will makes more and more sense. Will was a much better prize.

Hannibal pauses, a bit surprised that Tobias would admit to this so openly. “I am lean, and lean animals yield the toughest gut.”

“I would have liked to hear a string quartet play you.” Hannibal does admit that the thought is interesting Tobias took his work seriously, so the musicians would be talented and using high quality instruments. He rather thinks few other people could appreciate that sort of resurrection in death.

“What stopped you from wanting to kill me? Or have you stopped?” Hannibal has no intention of letting Tobias kill him, even if the art would be impressive.

“I stopped after I followed you one night. Out of town. Out of state. To a lonely road. To a bus yard.” He has no trouble understanding what Tobias witnessed. At least that kill had not been a Ripper murder.

Hannibal is glad he made certain Tobias’s shop was empty, “and that changed your mind?” He’s not going to openly acknowledge his activities in a room he doesn’t control.

“I could use a friend. Someone who can understand me. I thought it would be you.” Tobias has finished coiling the wire, and puts it away. Now that he has made his point, Hannibal can tell he wants to back off on the threat. He’s still going to kill Tobias, but at least he won’t do it immediately.

“Not anymore?” Hannibal asks casually.

“No...I’d rather pursue a more interesting, less competitive friendship.” Spoken like a true narcissist. Tobias knows that Will killed Stammets- that brought the man’s empathy to his attention. He clearly does not know anything more about Will.

“There is already a great deal of attention on William Graham from the FBI. They’re going to find you if you give him any more *gifts* ,” Hannibal warns. If Tobias fled now, he’d be available for a longer, more intricate hunt later.

“Unlike some artists, my best works are not for public consumption. I’m sure dear William will appreciate further private gifts now that I have his attention.”

Hannibal almost decides to invite Tobias to dinner so he can eliminate him with more conveniently. Instead he merely says, “at some point my harpsichord will need new strings. Perhaps I will come see you then. I believe at this juncture we have nothing to offer each other.”

“No, not really.” Tobias walks forward, ready to escort Hannibal to the exit.

“Why *did* you have Franklyn pass on your message?” Hannibal asks.

“I was curious to see what you would do. And I thought you’d appreciate the artistry given your own prelidictions.”

“It was a risk, though I suppose we each have enough information about each other to go our separate ways.” Tobias nods in acceptance. Hannibal is fairly sure that the man won’t try to kill him. He’s too enamored with the idea that other people know about his kills. He’s exactly the sort of killer that Jack will catch, too convinced of his own cleverness.

“Thank you for stopping by, Dr. Lecter. Next week I might have a very private showing of a new installment. Should I call to see if you’re available?”

They have reached the door. Hannibal pauses before pushing it open. “No. You are reckless, Tobias, and I will not have more attention drawn to me.” He softens the statement with a conciliatory, “it sounds as though you have someone else in mind anyway.”

“Please, let me know if you change your mind,” Tobias asks politely as Hannibal steps outside.

“Goodbye, Tobias.”

Stealing a collection of human gut strings from Tobias’s workroom is easier than Hannibal expected. The man clearly did not think anyone would try to rob a small, though high quality, instrument shop.

Collecting the reviewer who had continued to write about Will was equally easy.

Taking a full night to prepare the instrument is an annoyance, but necessary to come anywhere close to Tobias’s already displayed skill.

Going through his rolodex and picking out a slim, dark-haired man took some mental effort.

Deciding on the location was the only challenge. Then he remembered that Lithuania had given the City of Baltimore an unusual gift a few years back.

Jack calls him the next morning to say that there was a crime scene at a sculpture of Frank Zappa's head.

"I take it that our cello-maker has made another instrument?" Hannibal makes certain to infuse his voice with some dread.

"A human harp. And another victim who looks to be playing the harp." Jack sounds angry, but then he often does.

Hannibal waits for Jack to continue.

"The body playing the harp looks like William Graham. There is a human heart at his feet."

"Is it Graham?" Hannibal asks, his voice full of concern.

"No, I've already checked." Hannibal notes that Jack sounds displeased. Jack had not entered his rolodex, but he has walked the line before. This moves him closer to the menu.

"Have you identified either victim?"

"We are still looking for an ID on the victim that looks like Graham. The harp is made out of human bone, but we have a lead there."

"That's useful. Medical screws or something else that could be ID'ed?"

"There was a business card wedged in the strings of the harp. We believe the owner of that card is the second victim."

“What makes you believe that?” Hannibal asks skeptically.

“Because it belongs to a music reviewer who has been critical of Mr. Graham. I need you to come to the scene and I want him here again. If the killer is communicating with Graham, I want to know what he’s saying.”

“I will try to make the arrangements.” Hannibal makes sure that his voice is full of doubt. He wants Jack to know that he owes him a favor.

In reality, he’s pleased that he didn’t have to manipulate Jack into calling for Will immediately. Hannibal is excited to see if Will can really identify forged pieces of art.

Because while Tobias’s gift said that he could give voice to death and wanted an audience, Hannibal’s gift has a different message. He’s emulated Tobias’s aesthetic, but if the singer can really see him under the facade of another’s work, well, it would exceed all of his hopes.

Hannibal starts to dial Will’s number. Taking someone to see a new art exhibit was a fairly conventional choice for a first date.

Chapter End Notes

COVER: The name given to an understudy in opera; someone who replaces a singer in case of illness or other misfortune.

Yes, Lithuania really did give the City of Baltimore a sculpture of Frank Zappa's head. Zappa was born in Maryland, and raised there and in Florida until he was 12. Not Louisiana, but I'd still call it Southern.

Some parts of Tobias's and Hannibal's conversations are from Fromage.

As always, this chapter may undergo minor changes and edits over the next few days.

Embellishment

Chapter Summary

Hannibal preens as Will unravels the meaning of his art.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Within a few days of the human cello display, the theatre had invested in increased security. The evening of his first appointment with Hannibal, Will resumed his role in the opera and the required late hours. So he is less than thrilled to be woken up by Hannibal's early morning call. Still, he gives Hannibal his address and promises to be ready by the time he gets there. Hannibal allows himself a small amount of smug satisfaction that he only needed a small amount of manipulation to secure the singer's attendance.

The apartment is in a nicer area of town than Hannibal expected. As soon as Hannibal brings the Bentley to a halt, Will is exiting the lobby. His coat flutters behind him, his hair is covered by a plain black beanie hat, and he's sporting a single morning's worth of stubble, barely a shadow on his jaw. He's pleased that it will pair well visually with his own subdued grey suit. He likes the idea of them standing close together, complementing each other.

However, Hannibal is slightly alarmed that each iteration of the singer has been appealing. If there are pictures of him in the throes of his encephalitic state three years ago, Hannibal's worried he'll find even that attractive.

Hannibal offers the man a thermos filled with coffee as he gets into the car. Will's smile is a combination of appreciation and knowing. He accepts the small gift with a verbal thanks, even with the gossamer thin ties of gratitude attached. Hannibal takes careful note that small, practical gifts were not even given a token protest. Each piece of information may be needed as he lays siege to Will's walls.

After making a show of checking the GPS, Hannibal begins to drive towards the morning's display. "I feel that as a friend and a doctor, I must warn you that the scene we are visiting is likely to be macabre." Hannibal is not the best judge of what other people would consider

gruesome; still, he can parse it out based on past experiences, and he believes the scene they are about to see qualifies.

"Are we friends, Hannibal?" asks Will casually.

It's a valid question. Hannibal feels quite close to Will already. The glimpses the singer has allowed in person and the hidden depths of his performances have pulled Hannibal in. "I hope we will be," he says after a moment of silence. "I have few close friends and far too many acquaintances. I feel as though we could understand each other." Unspoken is the the knowledge that Will could understand him, or anyone: the importance is Hannibal's mutual understanding.

Will hums in pleasure as he tastes the coffee. Hannibal resolves to see what noises he'd make over a full dinner. The schedule at the theatre probably prevents him from enjoying home-cooked meals.

After he finishes his sip, Will admits, "it is rare for me to see the potential for reciprocity in my relationships. I'm glad I'm not the only one who sees that potential. Though I do have to ask, do you often become friends with your patients?"

Hannibal smiles softly in pleasure at Will's banter. He had been afraid that by catering to Will's loneliness that the singer would lose his fascinating intransigence. "Not at all. But you are more a student than a patient anyway. The goal is for you to have methods for coping with stress, not ongoing therapy."

Hannibal plans to end their doctor-patient relationship as soon as the opera company is satisfied with his reassurances as to Will's mental health. And if their friendship develops such that Will still visits his office, that will be a pleasant convenience without violating any of the rules that govern his profession.

"So do you often become friends with your students?" There is a shrewd humor in Will's voice. When Hannibal glances over, he is biting his lip, eyeing the doctor speculatively.

Hannibal tries to avoid self-deception, so he has not yet made any firm determinations as to Will's interest in him. Now Hannibal judges that the attraction he feels is not one-sided. Interesting. The potential for more than friendship grows all the time. A truly empathic lover is an intriguing thought; he doubts anyone who has shared Will's bed in the past has understood the potential in a lover whose pleasure could be magnified so readily.

Under other circumstances, he might try to provoke a physical reaction just to use his senses and confirm Will's attraction. While he's driving is really not the appropriate time though.

He wonders how long Will has been aware of Hannibal's interest. He had made an effort during their first meeting to act with strict professionalism, which had been rather challenging considering that Will had been blood-spattered and acting deliciously vulnerable.

Perhaps his admiration of Will's half-naked form was not as discreet as he had thought during their second meeting after the performance. Though, it's also possible that Will's ability to understand other people makes Hannibal's mask less effective. It's actually rather frustrating considering how long Hannibal was worked to develop his human shield.

Since Will has not directly raised the issue of Hannibal's interest, he continues their conversation about friendship. He simply answers, "those who are worthwhile enough to mentor are usually worth the effort of befriending as well."

"I'm flattered. I suppose friends is a good start. I don't care for most people, but you have yet to disappoint." Will takes another sip of coffee before saying, "you haven't yet reacted overtly to any of my needling. It's impressive. By the time most people reach your social and professional heights, they've wrapped themselves up so much in their pride that's it's easy to get a reaction."

Hannibal supposes that as an empath surrounded by self-absorbed socialites, Will has to get his entertainment where he can. "Then I am flattered as well. I do worry that your habit of baiting people will haunt you though. Not everyone can see the humor in it." It's a lie. If Will pushes someone enough for them to actually snap, he's sure the singer will have already predicted the reaction and be prepared to counter it.

“If I didn’t bait people, I’d never have any fun in social situations. It lets me know who is worth talking to and who is worth placating and then ignoring.” He pauses, as though considering whether to add anything more, then admits, “or who is worth goading into a meltdown.”

“You would really push someone into an emotional break?” Hannibal certainly has done so in the past. But he has the advantage of access to already vulnerable people through his medical practice. Driving someone into a meltdown through purely verbal means, well it suggests Will’s insight could be honed into a weapon, or that his instincts for targets is well developed.

“Some people deserve to be broken down. And the level of entitlement that can be found in some of your fellow opera fans could provoke destructive thoughts in even the mildest person.”

Before Hannibal can respond, Will neatly changes the subject. “So, macabre scene? Can you give me any details other than ‘the FBI wants to see me?” Will’s dry tone says that Hannibal’s early morning phone-call provided insufficient information.

“I believe I also mentioned that if you are with me, it will be easier on you than if Jack sends an agent to escort you.” He sees Will nod out of the corner of his eye. “I rather think any details I could give you might influence your reaction.” Which really would be a pity.

“And the FBI wants to know my reaction?” Will asks skeptically.

“I’m sure that they do.” Though really, that’s a distant second to Hannibal’s own desires.

Will sinks back more fully into the seat, setting the empty travel mug back into its holder. Hannibal resolves to bring more coffee should they meet in the morning again. He enjoys the thought of Will’s belly being warmed by his actions.

They say nothing more during the rest of the brief drive. Will leans against the window and seems to doze, though Hannibal doesn't think he truly sleeps.

When they reach the Southeast Anchor Library, Hannibal is pleased to note that the statue and surrounding area are cordoned off. The opaque screen barriers are such that even though Hannibal is waved through the police roadblock after confirming their identities and purpose, Will cannot see the scene.

The energy between them ramps up as Will exits the car, and Hannibal isn't sure if he's reacting to Will's interest or if Will is reacting to his eagerness. He's pleased when the singer politely waits for him even as he fidgets. He's less pleased when a flawlessly put together Alana Bloom moves to intercept them. As much as he enjoys his former student's company most of the time, he doesn't want Will distracted from his viewing.

"Hannibal, oh, and it's William Graham, right?" Alana's smile is both brilliant and admiring. Hannibal recognizes it as akin to the ones she favors him with anytime she builds up enough courage to flirt.

He would nip that interest in the bud if Will's delicious darkness had not already made its appearance. Alana as she is now is far too sweet to appeal to the killer who's looking for an equal. Hannibal is glad he has not yet taken any steps to corrupt the woman, though he has considered it in the past.

"Good morning Alana. Will Graham, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Alana Bloom. She was one of my students during her residency at John Hopkins."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Graham. And please, call me Alana." She offers her hand, which Will shakes politely. His grip does not linger, and his smile lacks the sly edge Hannibal is growing fond of.

"It's my pleasure. Will is fine for me as well." He turns to look at Hannibal, "I take it this is one of those students who was worth your time?"

"Without a doubt." Hannibal redirects his attention back to Alana. "I take it Jack called you for your input as well? I was under the impression you were taking some time after the Shrike case."

Alana blanches, “yes well, I’ve taken enough time. Two deaths in five days is a very short cooling off period. Jack needs all hands on deck.”

As Hannibal moves forward, Alana unconsciously makes room for him. He slides his hand to the small of Will’s back to direct him forward. In contrast to his expectations, the singer relaxes into the touch before seemingly remembering himself and stiffening away from it. Hannibal wonders if he is touch starved or perhaps affection starved.

“So it’s the same killer?” asks Hannibal as they move closer. A few of the forensics people are visible at the edge of the cordoned off area, a few of them taking photos of the surrounding area while studiously avoiding looking through the gaps in the opaque screens.

“Why don’t you look for yourself.” She hesitates, “if you don’t want to look, Will, that’s fine. I’m sure you’re not used to things like this.”

“I’m pretty sure Agent Crawford will insist I look anyway. I might as well look while I have some moral support.” He nods at them both and then waves at Beverly who had raised a hand in greeting after peeking around the barricade.

Alana sighs, then moves away, skirting around the screened area towards a gathering of law enforcement officers, probably to continue working up a preliminary profile of the killer.

Hannibal steps around the barrier first, and carefully positions himself so he can see Will’s face as he takes in the tableau.

Blue eyes drink in the scene, fluttering shut for a moment, then opening again to take in a new aspect.

“This isn’t right,” Will murmurs. The enclosed space is small, probably half the size of Hannibal's office, but with all of his vocal training, Will’s voice cannot be heard by anyone but Hannibal.

Hannibal leans closer and asks, “what isn’t right, Will?”

“This. It’s...I need to get closer.” The singer sounds dazed, lost as his eyes try to take in all the details at once.

Hannibal knows that Will has already caught hints of the differences.

A pale, dark-haired body is perched on the stone plinth that supports the Frank Zappa bust. The profile is in clear view from their current position, lips and cheeks accented with red that on closer inspection will prove to be blood. Male; in life he was pretty with soft features. In death his pallor hides some of the prettiness, but not the overall symmetry of his features.

The torso is bare, a gaping chest wound crimson against the pale skin. What modesty a corpse can claim is preserved by a scarlet silk cloth wrapped around his hips. His feet and knees both have blood dried on the bare skin, though no obvious wounds.

The red stains on the body draw the eye immediately, forcing the viewer to see the musician first and not on his instrument. Hannibal sees the moment Will really begins to look closely at the massive harp on the ground in front of him. A smile hovers on Will’s lips before he can control his expression.

The posing of the dead harpist shows him preparing to play. His left hand is raised, fingers splayed against the strings of the instrument, his right is curled in his lap. The wires holding him in place are so fine, they’re nearly invisible. Only the blood beading up from the wounds mark where the wire pierces the skin.

At a glance, the instrument is the proper shape and size for a traditional concert harp. From a distance, the frame seems to be ivory, or perhaps bleached wood. When seen up close, it doesn’t take a musician to realize that the materials are far from traditional. Hannibal watches, rapt, as Will moves closer. His eyes widen, and Hannibal sees a spark of appreciation light in them.

The frame is almost entirely made from bone. Long bones are lashed together with silver wire to form the front column, while the harmonic curve on top is made from a human spine

set against a thin arch of bone white wood. In a moment of whimsy, Hannibal had used an actual shoulder blade for the shoulder of the harp. The bottom curve and sound box are a mosaic of smaller bones pieced together. Parts of the bones have been removed or filed down to make the shape more accurate.

Hannibal even used the full 47 strings of a traditional harp. Though the instrument lacks pedals, the gut strings that Tobias unknowingly supplied are pulled taut enough to allow some notes to form. Will's well-trained hands could probably even coax music out of the primitive harp.

From the corner of his eye, Hannibal sees Will's fingers twitch. He wonders if the singer had just had the same thought.

As Jack had mentioned, a human heart rests at the feet of the harpist. Jack had failed to mention that it is cradled in a bowl crafted from a human skull. He wonders how long until the forensics team realizes that the organ at the body's feet does not belong to the body itself. After all, he had taken the heart of the Will surrogate for his own use.

Will walks slowly around the body, and Hannibal finally takes conscious notices of the others around the scene. The forensics team are carefully cataloging and identifying each component, seemingly content to allow the two men to look at the whole. Jack stands in the corner, speaking on his phone, his back to the corpses.

Hannibal is standing directly opposite of the singer when Will notices the drawing held in the corpse's right hand. Will bites his lip in thought as he bends closer to the diagram. His mouth opens, to question or to identify? Hannibal is uncertain.

Because, unfortunately, Jack has noticed the pair of them standing there.

"Mr. Graham. I took the time to read your biography after our last meeting." Jack makes the simple statement sound threatening. There is, of course, no thanks offered for the singer's presence.

"Should I be flattered?" Will parries.

Jack looks like he wants to grit his teeth. He must have been told to play nice with the singer. "Probably not. Can you confirm a few things for me?"

Hannibal's hackles raise at the tone, and apparently Will's do as well. Rather than placate as he had in the past, Will snaps, "I may be able to. But I will note that this is the last time I will come and be ambushed by a scene like this."

"Excuse me?" Jack uses his superior height to loom and add weight to his snarl.

"It may shock you, but I don't actually have to answer your questions. We both know that I didn't do this," here Will gestures at the bodies. "I am here as a courtesy. Push me too far and I'll have to ask for legal representation if you want to talk to me at all."

Jack's eyes narrow. "Push you too far? People are dying. Dying for you." The accusation in the tone attempts to pin the blame entirely on the singer.

Will refuses to accept that responsibility. "People die. It's what they do. It's not my fault, and while I'm willing to help, dragging me out here as a personal test subject is ridiculous. And blaming me for someone else's murders is beyond the pale."

Jack backs down. When put like that, his statements could easily be turned against him as the FBI blaming a victim instead of catching a killer. "You're here to answer questions," he finally says. "You're not here to be a test subject." Hannibal notes that Jack does not address the last statement; the agent unwilling to accept blame.

Again, Will pushes back. "Do you really think it's okay to have an-almost victim of one serial killer and possibly the target of another out here being exposed to more death? Specifically the death of someone who is clearly supposed to look like me? How will your superiors feel about involving random citizens in your cases?"

"Is that a threat?"

“No, it’s a legitimate question. I’m here now, I’ll answer your questions, but if you need my input in the future, remember that I am not an agent on call for you to use.” Will is apparently still upset at two unnecessarily early mornings. After a pause he adds, “And I’m not bait to dangle in front of the killer either.”

“I will take that under advisement,” Jack grits out.

“So, your questions?”

Jack pulls out a small notepad. He glances down, grimaces, and flips the page before asking, “has anyone tried to contact you about the first death?”

Alana has just walked into the enclosure and closes the distance enough to hear the first answer.

“An obnoxious woman named Freddie Lounds managed to get my cell number. She called twice.” For the first time since he arrived at the scene, Will shows some discomfort, pulling at a lock of hair that curls out from under his hat. His posture slackens slightly. Hannibal notices that Alana mirrors it almost instantly, though Jack is unaffected.

“I’m sorry you were forced to deal with her,” offers Alana, wincing sympathetically.

“No calls, no packages?” asks Jack as he makes a note. His lips are curled in distaste, either from the mention of Ms. Lounds or from Will’s failure to instantly identify as suspect.

“Theatre security is taking care of that- you’d have to ask them. None that have reached me, at least.”

“And does this location have any meaning for you?”

Will makes a show of looking around. "I've not been in Baltimore very long. I don't think I've ever been to this library."

"What about the sculpture?" Jack prods.

"Only that Frank Zappa was a musician. I don't know anything about him or this," here Will waves at the bust suspended above the murder scene. "If I hadn't been told, I wouldn't be able to put a name to the face."

"It was a gift from Lithuania to the city," Alana says, reading from her phone. Always the peacemaker, Alana is trying to soften the edge of Jack's questioning.

"I have no ties to Lithuania, or any other Baltic nation." Will doesn't look at Hannibal when he says this. The slight suspicion in his tone says enough.

"Do you recognize the body?" Jack asks before Alana can add anything else.

"I don't know many people in Baltimore, as I said, I've not been here long. He doesn't look familiar, other than looking a bit like me." Hannibal wants to huff and explain that on short notice finding a pig worth slaughtering that had more than a passing resemblance is not a simple task. It's odd. He's never felt the desire to explain before, especially not with Jack right there.

Whatever Jack asks next is lost to him as he considers the depth of his desire for Will to understand the art, and in turn understand Hannibal. He forces himself back to the conversation at hand.

"It says in your biography that you play the harp."

"Yes, among other instruments," Will admits.

“Is that the kind of harp you play?”

“No.”

“No?” Jack sounds surprised. “You mean you play smaller ones?”

“No, I mean the harps I play are not made out of human bodies.”

Hannibal makes sure that his snort is muffled. Alana sighs slightly in exasperated amusement, probably a bit relieved that the ‘traumatized’ singer can still offer some humor.

He can almost see Jack pulling his angry outburst under control. “Fair enough.” Hannibal can tell Jack is biting back some comment about Will’s lack of respect for the dead. “The last display had opera music. This one has a drawing instead of sheet music.” Jack points at the dead man’s hand, and Will moves closer so he can clearly see the design.

Jack continues, “we’ve not pulled it free yet, and may not be able to until the scene is processed. I’ve been told you’re an art expert, can you identify it for us?” There is challenge in Jack’s question, as though he doesn’t believe in Will’s credentials.

Rather than rise to the bait, Will counters, “I’m not an expert. However, from what is visible, that is a drawing of the Wheel of Fortune. You can see Fate sitting in the center.”

Of course this is when Zeller decided to add his thoughts, “I’ve watched Wheel of Fortune, it doesn’t look like that.” Hannibal wishes he could enjoy being correct about Zeller’s uselessness.

Will doesn’t bother to hide his eyeroll. “I was trying to be helpful by using the English term. The drawing is the Rota Fortunae. Common in Medieval art, it’s a demonstration of the capricious nature of fate- as the wheel turns, some men are lifted up, and some are dashed to the ground.”

“It’s not found solely in visual art,” Hannibal adds. “In the seventh canto of Dante's Inferno, Virgil speaks of the Rota Fortunae.”

Immediately, Will’s eyes snap up to his before narrowing in thought. Hannibal keeps his face impassive as Will scrutinizes him, eyes flicking from the scene and then back. Apparently his effort to misdirect has been spotted. He wishes he knew what flaw in his human shield Will had spotted.

“Do you know the specifics, Dr. Lecter?” Asks Jack, sounding pleased to have any additional insight from someone whose opinion he trusts.

Hannibal clears his throat and mentally flips to his favorite translation. “From the Inferno, ‘ *Your wisdom cannot withstand her: she foresees, judges, and pursues her reign, as theirs the other gods. Her changes know no truce. Necessity compels her to be swift, so fast do men come to their turns. This is she who is much reviled even by those who ought to praise her, but do wrongfully blame her and defame her. But she is blest and does not hear it. Happy with the other primal creatures she turns her sphere and rejoices in her bliss.* ’”

Hannibal allows himself to preen in the silence that follows his declamation.

“And yet, I doubt this is a reference to Dante,” says Will slowly.

“Why do you say that, Mr. Graham?” Jack sharply demands.

“Because I have never performed any work based on Dante. Music I actually sing was found with the cello.” Hannibal smiles at Will’s quick interpretation and willingness to counter Hannibal’s explanation.

“Do you have a better idea what the drawing may be referencing then?” Alana asks delicately.

“Carl Orff’s *O Fortuna* is one of the most well known pieces of classical music today.”

" *O Fortuna* ?" asks Zeller. "I think I've heard that before. It sounds familiar at least." Hannibal, of course, is quite familiar with it.

"It's a part of *Carmina Burana* and a reference to the Wheel of Fortune," says Will.

"And?" prods Jack.

"*Carmina Burana* is listed as a part of my repertoire on my biography." Will refrains from pointing out that Jack had already mentioned reading Will's biography. The singer then continues, "though really it should be removed- my vocal range isn't really right for most of it anymore."

"That doesn't help at all," sighs Zeller. Hannibal wishes that one of the other forensics techs would pull the man back to the bodies.

"I wouldn't know what's useful to you, but it could clarify some things about this." Will offers slowly. Hannibal wishes that Will was working though the display privately. He would rather hear Will's interpretation without an audience. He's sure that the singer is trying to understand it, and doesn't really care if the FBI learns anything.

"How so?" asks Alana. "Are there parts of *O Fortuna* that mention anything we can see here?"

"There is a part in *Carmina Burana* that reference hearts and also the Wheel of Fortune. Let me see if I can remember it." Will's eyes fall shut and his lips move silently.

The rest of them wait in silence. Hannibal hopes it takes awhile for Will to remember so he can watch the impatience crawl across Jack's skin.

"It may be refrencing the final stanza from *Omnia sol temperat*," Will declares.

“Can you recall it for us?” Asks Hannibal, impressed at the speed of the identification. The use of the Rota Fortanae had been a calculated choice. He’s pleased that Will’s interest in art and familiarity with *Carmina Burana* has come together so well. It would have been disappointing for his message to be missed.

Will hums a few bars before answering. “I’m not warmed up, but sorry- too much of my memory is caught up in singing the lyrics rather than reciting them.” That said, he tilts his head back and sings, “*Ama me fideliter! fidem meam nota: de corde totaliter et ex mente tota sum presentialiter absens in remota. quisquis amat taliter, volvitur in rota*.”

Even without a warm up, the tenor sings beautifully. His voice resonates in his chest as he dips into a lower register. The words slip through his lips bleeding with emotion. Hannibal has to restrain his urge to clap when Will finishes the final note.

Biting his lip, Will then translates, “Love me faithfully! See how I am faithful: With all my heart and with all my soul, I am with you. Even when I am far away. Whoever loves this much turns on the wheel.”

“A love poem, really?” asks Alana. “An odd choice for a sociopathic killer.”

Hannibal has thought about publishing his own paper on the emotional lives of sociopaths; the assumptions other psychiatrists make simply don’t capture his truth, or the truth of many patients he has worked with. Perhaps a paper for posthumous submission. No reason to give anyone in law enforcement ideas linking him to sociopathy.

Will raises an eyebrow doubtfully. “Of course a doctor will know more about sociopaths than I do.” Hannibal knows he is the only one who hears the faint mockery in the statement. “I’m certain an actual medieval scholar could provide you other options. I don’t think you’d care any more for the other reference I can think of immediately.

“Oh, do share,” interjects Hannibal quickly.

Without missing a beat, Will launches into song again. "*Tua pulchra facies, me fey planszer milies, pectus habens glacies, a remender statim vivus fierem per un baser.*"

"Which translates to?"

"Your beautiful face, makes me weep a thousand times, your heart is of ice. As a cure, I would be revived by a kiss."

"No mention of the Wheel in that part," interjects Jack.

"No, but there is the heart reference in the stanza."

"So either way, this is what, courtship?" Jack says cuttingly. "Unbelievable."

"I'm not a profiler, Agent Crawford. I'm just saying that my best connection to the Rota Fortunae is through *Carmina Burana*. And if the heart is part of the message, then those are the two stanzas that come to mind."

"Is there anything else you can tell us, Will?" asks Alana gently.

Will had backed away from the bodies during the discussion. At Alana's question he moves closer, leaning in to examine the harp. "The strings look like they're made of actual animal gut. Those take awhile to make."

"How long?" asks Zeller curiously.

"I have no idea- I just know there are experts who still hand make them in Italy, starting when they're still warm from the animal. And I only know that much because daring someone to watch the first phase of harvesting them is a way teenage musicians gross each other out."

Hannibal's research revealed that William had trained in Europe as a teenager- he can easily imagine Will walking the streets of Cremona, Italy- the curious youth peering into the shops lining Stradivari Square and marveling at the traditional instrument makers.

Jack moves into Will's personal space, silently asserting control over the situation. Hannibal moves closer to Will as Jack speaks. "I've been told that you have an ability to empathize with killers. In fact the bones of the journalist who wrote about that is probably right in front of us. Can you give us any insight into what the killer was thinking?"

Will takes a step back, brushing against Hannibal's arm and stopping with the doctor directly behind him. "I can empathize with anyone. But I don't have the training to do what you're asking."

"Really Jack, that's why you have profilers. And we don't perform as a party trick. Asking Will to do so is unfair," Alana intercedes.

"He does it on stage every day," says Jack defensively.

"For fictional characters, not serial killers!" Alana snipes back.

As they argue, Hannibal moves even closer to Will, trapping the singer between him and Jack's overbearing presence.

Rather than let Hannibal continue to crowd him, Will speaks up. "Look, if there are other messages here, I cannot share them with you." Will edges around Jack, moving past Alana and walks out of the enclosed crime scene.

"Perhaps you should pursue the harp strings, as William mentioned, Jack. There cannot be that many places that still use gut these days." Hannibal turns to follow the singer.

Jack places a hand on his shoulder. Rather than snarl or shrug it off, Hannibal pauses. Jack lowers his voice to a whisper, "see if he'll agree to police protection until we catch this guy."

“He already told you he’s not bait, Jack.”

“Then convince him that he needs some protection. I don’t want to be accused of letting a killer hunt someone when we know he’s a target.”

Hannibal nods sharply and continues on. He makes no promises, especially since he will not do anything other than make an offhand mention to Will. He doesn’t want an officer eagerly arresting Tobias while protecting Will.

If police officers arriving to interview him doesn’t spook Tobias on its own, the rage he’ll feel when he learns about Hannibal’s mimicry will certainly drive him into a rash action. He’s just not sure who Tobias will target first. Either way, allowing Tobias to be arrested is an unacceptable risk.

Will had paused outside while Hannibal spoke with Jack. He’s looking at the crowd outside the police line with distaste.

Neither of them speak as they walk to the car. Hannibal doesn’t react at all when Freddie Lounds calls out questions.

Once they’ve reached the safety of Hannibal’s vehicle and are driving away, he turns to Will and asks, “so what couldn’t you share with Jack?

Will has his head back against the seat. His eyes stare unblinking at the roof of the car. Hannibal wonders if he will descend back into the mindset of one of the killers to answer the question. But his voice is fully present when he answers, “if the artist of the first gift wanted to perform for me, this artist wants to provide for me.”

“What leads you to that conclusion?”

“He’s offering an instrument to play on- one he made himself. He’s offering mutual audience and appreciation.”

“You don’t think it’s the same killer,” Hannibal notes. His voice is too interested. He cannot help it. Will’s ease at piercing through to the artist fascinates him.

“No. The first killing was all about the killer. This is a courtship in a truer sense.”

“How so?”

“He offered a heart and took one himself. I’m not sure how much clearer it could be.” Will sounds frustrated. Hannibal can understand that frustration. How many times has Hannibal heard terrible explanation for his art, only to have this man see through multiple layers and a forgery to the message beneath? No wonder Will wants someone to understand him if no one bothers to look to see what he sees.

“You didn’t tell Jack,” says Hannibal, his voice carefully neutral. “Do you not think it’s important that you believe there is more than one killer?”

Sleep deprivation has kicked in now that the excitement of seeing the scene has abated. It takes a moment for Will to respond. “I don’t really feel inclined to help the FBI. And I’m not going to jump through hoops when I really doubt Agent Crawford will just accept my belief that there is more than one killer turning people into musical instruments.” Will’s voice is adorably sulky.

“Even if more people die?” aks Hannibal mildly.

“Solving crime is their job, not mine.” Before Hannibal can parry that response, Will says, “I try to control who I allow myself to empathize with. It makes caring about strangers challenging.”

“A defense mechanism.”

“A survival tool,” Will counters. “I’m not going to become every victim Agent Crawford blames on me.”

“You’ve honed your gift to aid your art. Is it really so taxing to use it more?”

Hannibal is surprised when Will actually answers. He thought that the singer would more aggressively conceal how his ability works. “Perception’s a tool that’s pointed on both ends. I’d rather not skewer my brain because Jack Crawford can’t do his job. There’s a reason he’s an FBI agent and I’m an opera singer.”

Hannibal drops the topic.

“If there are two different killers, what do you suppose they will do now?”

“It’s not an if- I can’t imagine the cello-maker evolving so quickly. Art is a skill that takes time to nurture.”

Hannibal agrees. “If we are to accept this as art, then yes. Pablo Picasso said, ‘It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.’ I suppose it would take more than five days for this killer to learn how to say more than ‘look at me.’”

“Exactly.” Will gathers himself and continues, “the cello-maker is far too impressed with himself to let an impostor stand.”

“How will he correct the impression?”

“It depends on his level of knowledge,” Will admits. “He might create a new instrument. More likely he’ll either confront his rival if he knows who it is, or his target audience if he does not.”

“Jack wants you to accept police protection,” Hannibal interjects. “If you are worried about the killer coming to you. You don’t think he will display something new first?”

Will glances over towards Hannibal. “You seem more interested in the first killer than I expected,” he finally says. “I thought you’d be asking more about the second killer.”

A frisson of unease traces along Hannibal’s spine. “Why do you say that?”

“Well, the second killer is trying to understand me. That’s an unusual action for a serial killer. I thought as a shrink you’d be interested in that.”

“Many serial killers are interested in their victims.”

“Of course they are, but that interest still doesn’t spring from the goal of understanding them as people. And I would argue that the harp-maker isn’t looking at me as a victim per se. And this is an attempt at communication that isn’t rooted in mockery. It just strikes me as *interesting* .”

The way Will stresses the word interesting is more rewarding than any other reaction thus far.

The singer continues, “plus, I thought that your national pride might have been hurt by someone overshadowing a Lithuanian gift with their own artwork.”

In spite of his attempt to conceal his reaction, Will’s smirk says that Hannibal failed to hide his surprise. Will’s vocal training had already narrowed down his homeland to Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania. He should have expected Will to take advantage of the opportunity to determine which Baltic state Hannibal hailed from.

Hannibal pursues another line of thought instead of answering Will’s question. “For someone who is not in the medical or law enforcement fields, you seem to know a great deal about the psychology of killers, Will.”

“Needs must when the devil drives.”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.” Hannibal recognizes the idiom, but is uncertain how it applies here.

“Necessity compels, Hannibal. Stammets was not the first time a killer thought I could understand them.”

The ease with which Will admits this fuels his curiosity. While Hannibal hates to be grouped in with others, he soothes the annoyance with the reminder that with just one tableau, Will had declared his work and mindset *interesting* .

Just how many killers had sought Will out? What happened to them?

It’s almost time to turn towards Will’s apartment. Hannibal wants to invite Will to his house, to cook for him and continue prying at the armor of his brain. Instead he murmurs, “we have an appointment later today. Are you still able to attend? I would like to continue this conversation.”

To his delight, Will responds, “do you have time now? I don’t see a point in delaying.”

“I love to have company with my meals. Perhaps we can continue over breakfast?”

There is dark satisfaction in Will’s eyes as he accepts the invitation.

Chapter End Notes

Embellishment - Decorations or extra notes added to an existing melodic line.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Thank you for all of your comments- I'm usually not sure how to respond, but I do read and think about all the comments I receive.

And of course preen at the Kudos.

End Notes

First time writing in the Hannibal fandom- I simply couldn't resist the idea of William as an opera singer.

I'm sometimes uncertain whether information is generally known, or specific to my fields of interest. I've simplified the actual structure of an opera company, especially with regards to how new singers join, and I'm trying to stay away from any obscurities. If there is a reference that is unintelligible, please let me know.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!